



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



EX LIBRIS

W. L. W.

ed Robe and Grey Robe

A NOVELIZATION OF "MARION
DELORME," THE GREATEST OF
VICTOR HUGO'S DRAMAS,
WHICH CHALLENGED THE IN-
STANT ATTENTION OF FRANCE

VICTOR HUGO



FENNO & COMPANY
11 East Sixteenth Street New York

The Knights of the Cross

By Henryk Sienkiewicz

The Beacon, Boston

It holds the reader spellbound, whether it rises into airy grace or dips into dread realism. It gives a powerful picture of the times in a strong love story, showing how the growth of Christianity was retarded by the excessively horrible crimes and abuses committed by the Knights of the Cross under the name of the Church.

The Churchman

It seems superior even to "Quo Vadis" in strength and realism.

The Boston Transcript

Written with all the great novelist's accustomed fire and intensity.

The St. Louis Globe-Democrat

As an historical romance it promises to rank with the other masterpieces of the author.

The Boston Journal

A book that holds your almost breathless attention as in a vise from the very beginning, for in it love and strife, the most thrilling of all worldly subjects, are described masterfully.

The St. Paul Globe

Thrillingly dramatic, full of strange local color and very faithful to its period, besides having that sense of the mysterious and weird that throbs in the Polish blood and infects alike their music and literature.

The Hartford Courant

Another remarkable book. His descriptions are tremendously effective; one can almost hear the sound of the carnage; to the mind's eye the scene of battle is unfolded by a master artist.

The Philadelphia Item

"The Knights of the Cross" has in store for it a reputation as great as that gained for "Quo Vadis," the book that, in its day, took the world by storm.

The Mail and Express, N. Y.

No one who reads "The Knights of the Cross" will for one moment regret the time thus spent.

The Philadelphia Telegraph

Of enthralling interest.

It is certain that "The Knights of the Cross" will evoke quite as much enthusiasm as did the earlier works by the same author.

Time and the Hour, Boston

Characters such as have not been delineated in English historical romance for decades

For those who really care for reading great literature, here it stands, written.

Saturday Evening Gazette, Boston

A thrilling romance, original, absorbing, and of high artistic value.

RED ROBE AND GREY ROBE
OR
RICHELIEU DEFIED

TO THE
LIBRARY

RED ROBE AND
GREY ROBE; *or*
Richelieu Defied

FROM THE FRENCH OF
V I C T O R H U G O

BY HENRY L. WILLIAMS
Translator of his "Les Miserables," "Ruy Blas,"
"Notre Dame," "Collected Poems," Etc., Etc.



R. F. FENNO & COMPANY
9 and 11 East Sixteenth Street, New York

TO THE
LIBRARY OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

COPYRIGHT, 1901

BY

R. F. FENNO & COMPANY

Red Robe and Grey Robe

RED ROBE AND GREY ROBE

OR

RICHELIEU DEFIED.

816 h
ma5w

CHAPTER I.

WHEN THE BLACK AND THE GREY GOWN
COMMUNE, LET RED PETTICOAT BEWARE.

It was towards the close of August, in the Year of Grace, 1618.

Albeit stretched on the rack, for the taxes and exactions of petty lords who tormented sunny France, Nature remained insensible to the fret of little man, however dressed, in cloth of gold, in homespun or clerical black, and the landscape was beauteous around and in the bourg of Richelieu.

The château was built in the later days of Francis I., and finished imperfectly, as all things were "finished" in those days when time little counted, under the late King of beloved fame, the Fourth Henry. It was almost entirely hidden in immense white and red-flowering horse-chestnuts. The old Castle of Duplessis-aux-Tours—alas! the towers were long since toppled down into the dust of the cellars!—lay in ruins on one of those twin hills overtopping the vale, and this crumbling pile confronted the old great church, on the other hill-side, also fallen in decay.

The hamlet was pervaded with that deadly stillness of mediæval humble life; it was two

centuries behind the towns, where merchant princes and burghers kept aflame the light of progress; out in the fields were the men and women, and even the children, at work, heaping the rocks up in the center of the space, which they threatened in another age to cover and make arid; the stunted horses and oxen toiled with no less stolidity; all that was hale and sturdy had been dragged off to the wars. What wars? Not one of the trudgers and toilers could define them; few statesmen kept the run of them, by the way; "the wars," that sufficed them—a hole in the earth somewhere to which were hurried their cattle, grain, straw, and grown-up sons!

A fine veil of mist rose and wrapped the heights. It filled up the gaps whence had been extracted stones displaced to build the new church—a chapel in the château grounds—and a hermitage up yonder on the hillside. A hermit had established himself there since a generation.

He had respected the sacred stones, in a measure, but paid no heed to those of the castle, robbing those warriors of the race of Duplessis, who had escaped sword and arrow and djerrid, with the hope to sleep in peace in their birthplace.

It was perhaps a lesson on the evanescence of fame, to see this fugitive from society, in his dull black and coarse garb, sitting on a stone, worn into a hollow in semblance of a seat, at his jagged doorway, for his feet were on a stone from a tomb; it showed carved hound and falcon and fragments of mailed feet, denoting that the tomb violated was a gentle-blooded warrior's.

The hermit viewed the scene, so habitual to

him, with listlessness, never dreaming, perhaps, of the lord of his manor who had shed his blood to be licked up by the burning sands of the Holy Land. He had crushed the viper-death with his iron-shod feet—only to be dust, bestrewing those wildflowers there.

In the old man's eyes, vacant as was their stare, floated the regretful glance of the aged—remorse or recall of dead sentiments—beloved ones gone before, nevermore to return—rarely in reverie.

In the other vale, the fog thickened and rolled before an intermittent breeze, savoring of forest leaves, which sent detached clouds into the roofless cloisters, where they wavered, like the spectres of priests, amid a colored flicker from still unshivered stained glass and the reflection from ivory and marble, mixed with the fallen sill-stones.

In the nooks, martens were chirping, or they darted out to chide passing birds, not of their kind, with peevish cries. Above all, soared the hawks, clamoring at the rising gale, of which they saw the potency afar off, almost sublimely ignoring the quarrels of the petty tribes under their circuits.

"How silent!" mused the lone man, combing his white beard with his thin fingers; "after all, perhaps it is only the misanthrope who seeks solitude!"

He had solemn reflections as he saw that church and castle alike had come to grief.

The pain was augmented by his wandering sight perceiving, above on a height and below on the plain, where the rivulet coursed, a windmill and a watermill, busy and noisy.

"The abbot preaches no more—the paladin molds like his lance! but the workers for

realization of the prayer: 'Give us this day our daily bread!' they go on forever."

Monksbane dotted with blue the vast sheets of grass, and mountain laurel, with death to the kid in its glossy leaves, lined the goats' paths up the steep.

The poor little cottages seemed the more miserable from the ground teeming with verdure and agricultural wealth, to justify the name of the manor—the RICH PLACE.

Suddenly the hermit started up.

On the higher land, where the main road skirted the woods, yet to be felled and the charcoal transported to the insatiable maw of the county town, he saw something moving amid the kaleidoscopic commingling of colors—moss spangled with its tiny flowers, lichens also, blooming in a modest way, the grass exhaling perfume, the myriad marvels of vegetation emitting their last salutation to the sun and to summer, like so many censers.

"It is he, I think! I was sure my appeal would bring him!"

Going into the cave, he picked up a pair of German spectacles with which he read his Bible, and donning them at the door, he watched the solitary wayfarer coming towards him with a steady foot, showing that he knew the road even over the quagmire and by the precipice.

The man who followed the zigzags of the path, made rather by straying cattle than man, was clad in grey and was not discernible at a distance by the naked eye.

As he came down the slope, he stopped to utter a prayer for both warriors and priests.

"He is right, they are both of his race—

soldier of Christ and soldier of Mars!" said the hermit.

On ascending the castle hill, the stranger showed that he was wearing a Capuchin's grey frock, girdled by a rope; out of the hooded cape peeped a black chinbeard and gleamed dark eyes, deeply set, though the man was not old and did not seem to be a student. His walk was firm as a soldier's; his feet were white and tender as if he had not long been accustomed to his footgear, rawhide sandals.

"This is not the Bishop, in disguise," muttered the ascetic with surprise. "He could never send a delegate in his stead when I impressed the importance and the private interests involved in the affair!"

The Capuchin approached so near that the hermit recognized him.

"Oh, it is the Father Joseph Le-Clerc du Tremblay," said he, like one who had all the talk of the county at his fingers' ends. "To you Peace, Father Joseph! Is the Bishop ill that he has not come?"

"Bishop Alphonse of Luçay is in excellent health, brother! but he cannot come. He leaves all to me, if anything is to be done upon your relation. You can have the more trust as you know me as his schoolmate at college, and his secretary since he entered into the diocese of Luçay."

"You are as welcome as he," returned the hermit, but his disappointment was manifest. "Be seated—"

"Yes, I traveled on foot."

"And have some refreshment."

"His Grace hopes that you have called him, by his representative, for something better than to lay the ghost of some disputed text

of the Gospels! I was in Paris when he wrote to dispatch me hither."

"The more reason you should refresh yourself before we talk at length."

The monk Joseph looked into the hermitage; it was no novelty to him; a large flat stone was set upon two or three others serving as a central support; on the slab two cups of hollowed-out pineknots, two platters of stone, arduously churned deeply, two wooden spoons, and on a hearth, from the fire of which the smoke curled up by a natural chimney, a pipkin breathing of soup flavored with wild mint.

"Boiled kid," said Simon; "and wheaten cake—"

"I have eaten on the road," replied Joseph, untempted; "and by your mien, I judge that you have news to impart, making appetite superfluous!"

The old man bowed gravely.

"It is a matter which you must decide upon, and no other. You know that, though base-born, I am a Richelieu, and so hold the interests of the house to heart?"

"You have proved it on occasion. You were a brave soldier in Spain and the Dutch Marches; before you cast off the mail for the sackcloth. So this concerns the House?"

And he looked over the castle ruins towards the château, its red tiled roof blotting the green like a lake of blood after a battle.

"Wait till I receive my evening's supply of milk."

He pointed to the village, on the circuitous road from which a girl was approaching, carrying a pot on her shapely, golden head.

Joseph studied the newcomer, as she gracefully made her way.

"I know her—but how she has grown! It is the daughter of the weaver Hervieu."

"Ramire? Yes. A heathen name, which the parish priest hesitated to apply to her with sacred sanction until I assured him that it was good orthodox Spanish."

"You were all-time her friend," observed the traveler.

"My reasons are strong; but, hush, she is in earshot."

The peasant girl, nimbly surmounting the last difficulties of the ascent, encumbered with strewn stones from the ruins, passed the monk in grey without more emotion than she would give a rock; Joseph, besides, had buried his face in his hood and sat statuesquely.

She nodded to the older man, entered the cave, poured the milk out of the pot into a stone jug which she readily found, all as gracefully as a Hebe, and asked in a voice sweet as befitted one so remarkably gentle among the dull, coarse, overworked peasants of the day and the region:

"Is there anything you want for the morning, Father Simon?"

"Nothing, child! You do not look so downcast as of late! Are your chicks feathering well for the winter—have you sold the sheep at a good price?"

"No, I feel better than I did. Good news sends a hint before—like the dawn has its fingers thrust out into the night before it discovers its hand full of glory!"

Joseph stamped his foot.

This exaltation of speech seemed to irritate him, as well as the refinement in one born a boor and bound to remain such on the manor of her fathers.

"Good afternoon, father!" she said, coming out, and, descending airily with the crock under one arm, snatched at a cluster of jet sloes from the thorn without wounding her delicate hand, like a bee gathering honey amid the briars.

"What do you think of her?" asked Simon, when the maid appeared on the opposite slope.

"Wondrously fair! no longer meet for the oaf to whom the lord engaged her, when I was last at Richellieu."

"Oh, she has a will of her own; and, independently of the marquis, eluded the offers to be run away with, from several: shipowners' sons of Nantes, rich farmers—I know not all! no coquette, but each day she seems to rise in the column of valuation—"

"Self-appraisement?"

"Not her own but the parish's. On market-day, you may see the pick of the young men loiter round the cross at the cross-roads to see her go by, perhaps to offer her a posy or a fine fruit, just as they are practical or poetical!"

"Our rustics poetical?—save the mark! However, I grant, I have read rhymes and seen their cause—less justifying rhapsodies! She is a morsel fit for a prince of the Blood Royal," added the Capuchin, reflecting on the beauties of the court.

"She is losing nothing by being born to a bucolic atmosphere. If not a prince as high as you say, some noble of no mean house is a-courting Ramire."

He spoke with a mixture of pleasure, pride and sorrow which perplexed the keen observer.

"What nobles are here? All the old ones live retired, suffering from wounds or rheuma-

tism owed to the religious wars, and their sons are packed off to the capital to be brushed, licked into shape, like Orson, for the court's eyes, at one of those gentleman-finishing academies suggested by Henry IV., or, better, by his Minister Sully."

"I think this cavalier is of the Academy of Ovid. I saw on a tree-bark—and I could show it you—a passage in Latin, cut by a Milan dagger and not a lout's billhook. This lover is a noble, and he is of the country, certes!"

"I should like to know who dare poach upon Richelieu!" said the monk with a most unholy flash in his dark eyes.

"It is not known yet."

"Even to you, Simon, who glean the secrets of all for leagues around?" returned the other with a slight sneer. "You know when the notary has forged a will as you do when the wood-cutter has a poached Muscovy duck for supper! You must know whom the lass loveth!"

"At least, I suspect he is no stranger to the district."

"A stranger," and the listener laughed drily. "I did not pass my holidays here, beside his Grace the Bishop, reading under the ancient elms his favorite Tasso, without observing your peasants. Oh, of all the Arcadians who begrudge anybody but the natives enjoying their vale! A stranger—marry! They would chase out a stranger, with the dogs, and a fiery petard attached to his points!"

"Truly," resumed the hermit, "this is no stranger. He has, on a stormy night, descended yonder path, along the Devil's Backbone, with a step as unshaken as yours an hour ago! He threads all the woodland paths without displacing a bramble or a mossy stone! At the

same time, he fell into a trap I laid for him, only escaping with the loss of the skirt of a mantle. Velvet of Genoa, brocade on brocade, with real gold lace; it is the garment of a high noble, I vow!"

From a hole in the wall, between two stones, a rude clothespress, he produced the rag in question.

"Yes, it is rich stuff!" said Joseph.

"It was a trap made by the blacksmith for the man-wolf supposed to prowl the environs of the hamlet!" proceeded the hermit. "My suspicions were aroused by the vehemence of Ramire, protesting against a snare being set—'For, who knows,' she said, with tears, and wringing hands, 'what innocent might not fall into the cruel jaws?' However, the unknown rover escaped with his cloak torn, no more than if he had run the gauntlet of the cloak-snatchers of the town."

"I never saw such velvet in Paris," replied the Capuchin. "It is rich—probably procured from some of those peddlers who traverse the kingdom and sell cheaply to cover their true avocation of spies."

"Then, if this wanderer does not come from the court," went on the hermit, "his irregularity of visits would lead to the belief that he is with the army. Stay, now I bethink me, Ramire hums an army song—"

He sang—indecorous though the words were in a cenobite, devoted to peace:

"The cannon are speaking,
The trumpets are sounding;
The fifes they are squeaking,
Our hearts they are bounding—
'Tis the signal of war!"

"It is the March of the Regiment of Richelieu," said the monk simply; "that the daughter of a soldier who marched with it should murmur it, 'tis not remarkable."

"It is only a link in my chain of reasoning."

"To what end?"

"I asked my Lord Bishop to travel so far to tell him all. But, hark!"

"To what?"

"We are no longer alone."

"That girl returned?"

"No, a man in the myrtle thicket yonder."

"Your eyes are better than mine, if thirty years older! I see—yes, I do see some one. Odd! it is my own man."

"Your man?"

"Yes, you ought to know him. He comes from Liesse; but what is he doing here, when I left him at Champrave, with strict orders not to quit the inn?"

"If he is your man, call him!"

"Hist! Laubardemont!" cried out Joseph.

The man, caught by surprise, stopped in the mass of foliage. But a repetition of his name forced him to own that he was discovered, and he slowly left the covert, recognized the hermitage at the entry to which sat the two ecclesiastics, and with reluctance came towards them.

"I know the rogue now," observed the hermit. "He is the very picture of those queer cagots of the Crumbling Mountain, the Bards-of-the-Mount, as they call themselves, who pretend to be descended from the Druids whom Julius the Emperor reduced into impotency so that they received the religion of Christ."

Laubardemont was a tall, lanky, bony man, with a forbidding aspect on the whole; his eyes were shifting and his complexion at the

same time yellow with jaundice and flushed with blood; he coveted and he shrank from gratification, if it cost him an act of daring or a pang.

"What are you doing in Richelieu?" asked his master, for the rules of even the Capuchins allowed a titled member to have his body-servant, if he pleased, outside the monastery walls.

And Joseph du Tremblay was esteemed highly as head of one of the first houses of the county.

"Bringing bad news—"

"What bad news would reach you at the secluded Golden Fowl?"

"Bad and sad, master mine!" responded the fellow, slowly, as if to keep the hearers—for the hermit was interested—on tenterhooks. "There came to the Inn, from the South, a varlet who was in flight for his native Picardy. The Picards are close knaves, but the host had a choice wine which would unseal the tongue of a Turkish mute. He and I hobnobbed, for he was thankful that I, who told him I could see he was fleeing for his life, did not denounce him, and he shared with me his story."

"Let it not be a long one," said the Capuchin severely. "It may have saved him, but it will not save you the strappado!"

He brandished his rope girdle with a significant swish in the air.

"But it concerns *us*! He was the man to a Breton noble who, having slain his antagonist in a duel, dismissed his valet, so that each might seek safety his own way."

"To the point, thou trifler with fire! Duels, spite of the interdictions, occur every day, among nobles."

"The antagonist of this Lieutenant Thèmines—"

"Stop! This sounds true," observed the Capuchin. "Thèmines is the name of that valiant old captain who arrested the Prince of Condé, two years ago, when he was the chief of the great Coalition against the realm."

"This is one of his sons, master. By the same token, the duel came about by the master, our marquis, joking young Thèmines on his father having won the marshal's *bâton* for that capture. The marquis, seeing him display a new sword with pride, said that he had better brandish a cudgel! it was more in his family line! So, of course, Thèmines retorted that he could use either sword or cudgel on the speaker of insolence reflecting on his courageous father! They fought, with swords, and Richelieu fell!" concluded Laubardemont, blinking and wringing his long hands till the knuckles cracked.

"Our lord?" exclaimed the hermit, rising.

"I knew there was evil in the air," continued the valet, making the sign of the cross; "as I came from Paris, a humming-bird-moth fluttered across my path—"

"Pish!" ejaculated Joseph scornfully. "This looks as much like an assassination as a combat." Turning to his brother in the church, he whispered: "Father Simon, I should not argue against the marquis being sent into the West Country on a mission for the young King. This Breton hotspur was set upon him."

"Murder or fair play," interposed the valet pertly, who had overheard, "my poor lord is dead all the same!"

Simon looked up, with grief, if he felt any,

suppressed, and a light of ambition in his eyes.

"Bishop Alphonse would be the lord now if he had not renounced all on entering the priesthood."

"True," answered the Capuchin, uneasily. "He may rate them ill-advisers who urged that step. Armand is now head of his house."

The servant stood restlessly on one foot and the other, like a bittern in a marsh.

"Armand? young for the charge," observed Simon.

"Eighteen! princes may rule as kings before that age!"

"He is a princely youth!"

"Gifted, haughty, but frivolous as Alphonse is grave! Any bright light attracts the present-day youth! though they scorch themselves."

"Verily, I think he is capable of rushing into a flame for a prize, though he did burn for it."

Laubardemont edged off, as though he feared the turn the dialogue was taking.

"This sequestered father is a by-blow of the Richelieus," mumbled he, "and the other is a leech who clings to them. He made Count Alphonse surrender all and embrace the Church—see what he has lost by it! ah, as well put finger betwixt bark and wood as wedge myself betwixt that pair. But the marquis is dead! he will pour no more hot wine down my back or make me devour a red-hot omelet! beshrew him! and may my blessing—read backwards! pursue him whither he has gone, for making me wed that knagging Josseline, for all she was the next spinster on his list of the marriageable, when I had to marry or go to the

wars in our regiment! I wish now I had gone to the wars!"

"Armand might have done well at court, as a page," remarked Joseph, "but his ear for music was bad! As a clerk in the Finances, but he is not avaricious! As secretary to some kinsman, as he has an aptitude for scribbling—"

"He wrote verses at an early age," said Simon; "but as he had the modesty to inscribe Ovid's and not his own lines on our trees, I cannot criticise him now."

"He is not remarkable in any trait—"

"Rarely does precocity attain the ripeness of genius!"

"So he goes to the army," continued the Capuchin coadjutor of the Bishop of Luçay, with vexation. "What waste of young blood! to pass half the year in winter quarters, the other moiety in sieges, with more time before the mouth of the dicing cup than the breaching cannon's."

"But with his brilliant parts, do you not think that, in time, in some predestined field, he will shine?" said the other with animation.

"With what conviction you speak!" said the grey monk, startled.

"A Richelieu, may I not dream of the family's advance? Alphonse's eclipse within the cloisters pained me! I say this, though it may pain you, who counselled it. I hold lonesome watches up here, Joseph, wrapped in the fog which bathes the old ruins of the feudal fortalice. I stand among the ivy which binds the time-gnawed stones and I follow the owl in its silent circlings. I think of my forefathers, Brother Joseph, who listened to their instincts alone, and pillaged the country folk for the ul-

timate gain of Paris, its residents and its King. The robber barons have gone their way; the gilded courtier who squanders in the chief city the patrimony and the revenue is going. What will we have in their stead?"

"The priests, father! Already we own half the property in the realm; in another twenty years we will possess two-thirds!"

His eyes shone in his hood's shadows and his hands closed as though he were clutching something delectable.

"The marquis will not see this—perhaps, not I! but you may, and Armand, for sure, will!"

"Heaven grant it! But after a monarch so great as the Fourth Henry, stagnation follows, and it is vain fishing in muddy waters."

"The muddiest water clears, good Brother Joseph! The boy is a varied creature. I have seen him set his heel on a viper and replace a plow-upturned earthworm under the severed clod. He will rise! and not resemble that Roman Emperor who amused himself torturing flies. He will rise, when he steps into his own charmed circle, higher than my imaginings—"

"Mayhappen, higher than mine!" said Joseph, as if catching the other's ecstasy, "Simon, you are truly a Richelieu—no common man! So have I beheld this youth, grown man, on the most exalted heights, next the clouds that sweep under the golden floor of heaven! Your judgment is always sound; so affirms the Bishop, and, as far as I have heard it, so will I maintain. Armand may, therefore, grasp the sceptre, whoever wears the glittering, idle crown!"

"He will sway it like a king born to it, then!" continued the hermit, enraptured that

he had an echo. "But he must be corrected of following his impulses and inclinations in their simple transports. These young men of good families do good without pride in it, and commit evil without remorse."

"Armand, now that he is a lord, will listen to his brother, and to me, speaking after his prompting words! he will realize all the hopes of his line."

"To think," continued the hermit, while Laubardemont sat down at a distance and pretended to be playing the sentinel while straining his ears to catch a word here and there, "to think that a chance bullet, a pot of boiling pitch in the escalade, a breaking ladder in the assault—what say I? a fisticuff over a disputed turn of a card—any trifle may slay our ensign! veritable *ensign* of Richelieu! And, nearer home, a peasant's billhook may split that skull which contains the finest brains in all the county!"

"Why a peasant's billhook?" asked Joseph, perceiving that he had been dexterously brought to a point desired by the subtle old man.

"May not the charming Ramire have a rustic sweetheart who would waylay her gentleman-lover?"

"Oh, think you that Armand—"

"Master!" cried Laubardemont, springing up and retreating toward the hermitage.

CHAPTER II

ANOTHER GOOD SERVANT.

"Why the alarm?" questioned both the holy men.

Laubardemont pointed a trembling finger towards a grove, in the growing dusk.

"I spy a shadow—a demon rather than man, stealing through the berry copse as though he were proof to thorn and prick!"

"Like yourself, sneaking along! what a mock-solitude you have chosen, Father Simon," sneered the Capuchin. "It may be that maid's peasant swain—Hark ye! go and bring in that lurker! If you do it deftly I may pardon your rudely interrupting our colloquy!"

"Dead or alive!" said the valet, clapping his hand to his side where a broad knife clanked in a leather sheath, useful to carve or at close quarters.

"It may as well be her *noble* lover!" said the hermit, quickly.

"Take him prisoner with tenderness," added Joseph; muttering: "If it be Armand, he will come only if he is so disposed!"

While the servant, with great cunning and prudence, plunged into the bushes and by a circuit approached the suspicious spot, the two watching him, the elder observed to the other:

"As his Grace renounced his rights, all authority devolves on Armand—we must be heedful how we deal with him. The case is altered from how it stood when I ventured to summon the Lord Bishop."

"It little matters. See, it is not he, brother!"

The speaker seemed relieved by the discovery.

The man whom the tall Laubardemont dragged at arm's length, reminding one of a cup-and-ball, was short, thickset, jolly, but with that astuteness in which the dullest peasant acquired some training, at a period when he was plundered, flayed and scourged by the host of rapacity: tax-farmers and their myrmidons, his lord, other lords, temporal or spiritual, the city toll-keeper, the market-officer, the road-minder, all, in a word, above his state.

He grinned upon being hauled before the two, sitting on rocks like the Druids.

"It is not my lord, but the question is still burning," said Simon; "it is his man."

"Jean Laffemas!" exclaimed Joseph du Tremblay. "Another absconder! Scamp, what are you doing away from your regiment?"

"At least, you have your written leave?" added the hermit.

"I—I—"

"Come, no lies!" said the two examiners in unison.

Laubardemont had released his hold of his surcoat, which hid a kind of uniform, the royal blue, barred with the colors of Richelieu, and Laffemas stood up to his full height of five feet or less. He crumpled his moleskin cap in one fat hand and pulled at a shaggy shining forelock with the other, as a compromise between a military salute and a reverence to his spiritual fathers.

"To tell the truth, I heard that my wife is in a delicate condition—"

The Capuchin inquiringly glanced at his colleague, who nodded reluctantly. Then the lat-

ter shook his head and frowned, implying that he did not believe the servant.

"Some recruits who joined us, from Osier-sur-la-Marle, they said she rolled on the bed, crying out for her dear Jean Norbert, her husband, from whom the cruel war parted her!" and Laffemas, pulling down his round face, affected to brush away tears.

"This is a flimsy excuse—"

"My wife halloaing for me a flimsy excuse—you have not lately heard or seen my wife, Father Joseph! she was the Hop-o'-my-Thumb of the village when I was made to marry her, eighteen months ago, at the same time almost as Pierre Laubardemont here present was obliged to take Josseline in wedlock—"

The other servant made a wry face.

"It was on the list so—though perhaps we should have fared no worse had *Lau.* preceded *Laf.* on the marquis' roll of the marriageable—"

"Be reverent—the marquis is no more!"

"Dear me! the lord, dead? how did—"

"Your lord is your master, Count, now the Marquis Armand!"

"Whew!" The fat mouth pursed up to whistle in surprise. Then he became portentously grave.

"So, you bear a message from the new marquis? out with it—we know this to be so!"

"But—I—that is—my lord *the* lord over all the place, so young and yet enjoys the château, the farms, the—"

"Seize him and search him for a letter!" said Joseph.

"Never!" said Laffemas. "That is, I will not submit to that lout Laubardemont promenad-

ing with his bony fingers over me! His bloodless paw always gives the shivers!"

"Give up the message you bear, or be flogged!"

Joseph brandished his rope. At the sight of the knotted ends, Laffemas sighed.

"You are witness, Father Simon, that I am commanded by one, under Grace, set over me! here goes!" He pulled a folded and sealed paper, bound with rosy ribbon, out of a secret flap in his half-boot.

"You would not have thought of looking there, you oaf!" he jibingly said to his fellow servant. "We learn these arts in the army—which you were too much of a poltroon to join!" Then he whined: "I trust you will bear me out when my lord reprimands me for falseness in my trust. Yes, I am a false servant: I am not accomplishing my business. Believe me, gentlemen, the count made me swear on the crosshilt of my knife—a foresworn blade, though, for I learnt, in the army, to eat meat on a fast-day with it! I swore to eat this message before I wrongly delivered it; but it would be a choking mouthful! Laconic love, forsooth!"

Before he had finished this apology for his weakness, the grey monk had snatched the packet he held gingerly, and stepped within the hermitage, it being now too dark to read without artificial light.

Nothing was changed there since his last visit; for he found the bottle in which live sulphur was kept, and with a primitive match ignited a torch of fat pine, stuck up before a cross, carved in the jutting rock.

He returned, with his head drawn still farther back in his cowl.

"You were right," he said to the hermit. "It is he, and, worse than you imagined, he proposes to make the engagement with the girl binding before Mother Church!"

Though base-born and, consequently, it would be thought, delighted at the young Richelieu taking the honorable step, the holy ascetic frowned.

"It must not be!" exclaimed he, hotly.

"Never! it was madness before! now that he is the marquis—we should be fools to wink at it!"

Joseph cogitated, his course of thoughts impossible to follow in the double darkness of the evening and his hood.

The two servants looked askant at each other. Simon lowered his grey brows and watched the Capuchin under them.

"I have it," said the latter. "There is no such place for a young girl to come to her right mind as in a nunnery—"

The hermit lifted his head and shook it energetically.

"The Convent of the Austere Sisters at Montglavis shall receive her—"

"Nay," said the other eagerly, "not the black, blank, cold cloisters for a child! she must be loving, above her station, to enfold the affections of a youth like that! do not think to immure her in such sepulchral walls!"

"Are those of the tomb preferable?" coldly answered Joseph.

"Why need she die—why die a living death within a nunnery? she is so young—so tender, and has always been a model to her sisters!"

"You plead very warmly for her, Simon!"

"Because—because she is my grandchild! There, you know all."

"The holy man of the Castle Hill, father of that girl's mother! Miseracorda!"

"It is true! but too long a story for this hour. Her mother was not, as was given out, a babe dropped on the highway by the Bohemians, but a child I had brought out of Spain, by a nurse. She grew up with her foster-mother and loved her son. They were happy till death removed them, under my eyes. It was a proof, I took it, that heaven had overlooked—I do not say, pardoned my sin!"

"Heresy! heaven never overlooks—rarely pardons!"

"But you are human—you will pardon—pardon her! am I to go on my knees, hardened by those rocks, my only praying-desk—to implore pity for that child?—"

"Where will she be safer, from him—now a lord, with purse well-filled, thanks to my own stewardship, than in the grave or the convent?"

"I know not!"

"Nor I! but she must not see him again!"

"What did he write to her?"

"The usual flowery talk of the springtide of man. At twenty any woman is beloved, as long as she has blue eyes and sunny hair, where most of the women are dark, or *vice versa*! The young man is moody and his heart trustful. Wait till he comes to his thirtieth year!" Joseph let his hood fall back, and his eyes started out and were lustrous.

"Yes, the flame is more intense then!" said the hermit. "The flame is one to bask in until he is forty, and the decline begins! I have known the winter of love, and you, Joseph, the summer—oh, for that memory, be lenient to my poor grandchild!"

The valets were men of blunt sensibilities, but they shuddered to see the white bearded man clasp his hands in entreaty to the Capuchin, although the words of the appeal had not reached them.

"Let her live, then, with an emptied heart, to weep over the past illusion!" said the latter, wavering. "With time, all passes!"

He pressed his forehead as though to smooth out something rugged in his mind.

"When love sends no more rays to her soul, her eyes will shed no more tears. They must part—forever!"

"I have reflected," said Simon, with calmness which seemed preternatural after the outburst of parental affection. "Come into the cell."

"You, varlets, stand close!" cried Joseph loudly. "If one tries to flee, the other is absolved if he slay him!"

"Both will not flee," said the hermit caustically, "for each was made to wed the woman that the other courted! Did you notice that their grief at the marquis's death was overdone?"

The couple entered the cave, where the torch was revived by the tenant, who motioned his colleague to be seated. Out of a cranny he took a phial of China ink and reed pens which he used for glosses in his breviary.

"I do not want to run off, now that I am at home," said Laffemas. "You may put up your cheese-parer, which does not daunt me, for I have seen more terrible in the army! Besides, my lord is the master here, now, do you see! since his brother is no more! Is it true, Pierre?"

"True enough for me to bring the news. I

intended to have carried it farther, to Bishop Alphonse, but this meddling Capuchin is always dancing between the Richelieus and the outside world. But are you not counting your chicks too soon? Perhaps the Bishop's vows are not so binding on a nobleman that he may not break them, so as to take the reins from that boy, himself?"

"Sooner the boy, though a few months under the colors have made a man of him—it does improve one to be in the army! I get along finely with him, though he wants to ride the high horse."

"I like him best—but what are the two priests doing in the cave, like wizards calling up the Prince of Darkness?"

"A pretty simile for holy men, you pagan! But, if I may venture my nose, one is writing as the other dictates. Shrew them! I never see pen and paper but I think men are raising a devil that will not be easily downed!"

Placing the writing materials before Joseph, seated at a smooth-topped rock which might pass for a table, the hermit said:

"With that letter of Armand's as a model, you—with your skill in caligraphy, which made the Abbot Ugone remark you at an early age—you can write another missive which that traitor shall deliver. It will bid her go to meet her lover at Blois."

"Why Blois?"

"Because Mother Laffemas is there, in a little house in the environs. She was accused, with a band, you may remember, of poaching, and, between us, she kept the deersmeat till the higgler came to transport it to their secret market. But she is a good soul and will do anything for me, since I saved her neck."

"If you can trust your grand-daughter to her, I can trust my honor," returned the monk.

He set the letter before him, mused for a space and then wrote at a dash ("as all *good* forgeries must be executed," he said, with a deep smile) a page of about the same length. From "At the Camp," to "Yours ever fondly, ARMAND," all had no flaw in the critical sight of Simon, comparing the writings.

"Bind with the same ribbon and seal with the Bishop's seal bearing the family arms," said he.

As his confederate finished, he went to the doorway and called:

"Laffemas!"

The man came up with a lagging step, timorous.

"Your master loves a lass here. He writes to her mere sugary lines which give no intelligence. What did he purpose regarding her?"

"I am not in his confidence—that is—" for he saw by the torchlight that his interrogator frowned ominously. "I guess that he wants her to elope with him! the camp is full of forlorn damsels—"

"Enough! that will serve. Jean, you are dying to see your wife?"

"My poor, dear wife!" He suddenly wrung his hands hypocritically.

"But you want to see your mother sooner! You are a good son!"

"My mother? who is in jail for deer-stealing? of course, I should like to see my old mother—but—"

"Listen. Take this letter to Ramire, in her cottage. When she reads it, conduct her to the inn where the deer-stealers were arrested. The hostess is still at large, but has returned,

thinking the breeze has blown over. Tell her that Father Simon ensures her impunity if she will obey him now. She will find you two horses for a journey—”

“What journey, father?”

“One to be undertaken in the name of your master the Count-Bishop Alphonse, for whom I act and speak.”

“Good Lord, a journey, sir! and me fresh from hard riding, and, by the same mark! sore, sir, deep-seatedly sore—”

“Interrupt again, and I shall send Laubarde-mont on this errand! and you, to the galleys!”

That the hermit was of kin to the ruling family was nobody’s secret and the fat man shivered, like jelly on a hot platter.

He took the letter which Joseph brought out to him, and bowed with the utmost submission, as the recluse said:

“Place the girl on one horse—mount the other, and ride without haste, so-so, steadily, to Blois. At a cottage in the outskirts, near the hostelry of the Branch of May, lives your mother.”

“Not in jail?”

“Not in jail, thanks to me, but he who kept her out of it can put you in her vacant cell! Tell her that this is the girl who is to accompany her to the East Indies!”

“But if she will not go—?”

“She must go! never in the village did any one resist you and your mother in combination! She must go! and you with them!”

“I, father, to the Indies? a pagan country, and I never failed in my religious duties!”

“You can say your prayers under the sky along the broad Ganges as well as by your rivulet. This must be. Be within France this time

three weeks, and you, your mother and the girl will all be behind the bars!"

Jean shuddered and stammered.

"But a journey like that—it will cost hugely!"

"Therefore," interposed Joseph, "Laubardemont will take you the abundant means in a day or two. Besides, you can sell the horses at the seaport for swelling of your purse."

Laffemas bowed again, heaving a sigh though, which made the two start angrily.

"I am thinking of my poor wife—without an adieu!" explained he.

"Go, hypocrite!"

Scarcely was he lost in the gloom than Simon beckoned Laubardemont within the ray of light from the hermitage.

"Follow your fellow! he is going to Ramire's cottage. If he leaves it with her, return and tell the tale. If he leaves it alone, follow him until he joins his master—at the camp or elsewhere."

"The camp is far, and 'elsewhere' may be still farther," muttered the valet, with his dormant insolence re-awakened.

"Here is a purse of silver. Wait! Make sure that he is going to accost his master. Then cut him down and silence him so that not a syllable enlightens Count Armand upon what passed here."

"He may strike back; he can play with cudgel and cabbage-cutter, as I know from being pitted against him in our village sports."

"The Bishop will salve your weals."

"But my spiritual weal—he may kill me before I can repent?"

"The Bishop will secure you a lot in Paradise."

The man made a sour face, but humorously so that the grim monk called him a heathen not unkindly, and bade him go!

Joseph remained on the hill, which point gave him a view of the manor beneath the straggling "lamb-kill" laurels and the odoriferous sweet bays.

In the cell the recluse was letting the torch die down without offering to revive it.

"His grandchild," mused the Capuchin, shuffling in the sand with his leather shoe as if obliterating some trace. "It is not strange; I had remarked her vast superiority to her station. Look to what unhappiness education brings the peasant!"

His grey dress merged with the thickening fog, but he sat impervious to the damp.

"It must not be," said he, frowning terribly, "Armand in love is confusion to my design—to my aspiration and what shall be his. I need this promising youth as one to lean upon while I climb the hill. If he is made Prime Minister over France, and France is made foremost in Christendom, in sheer gratitude he must assist me to my goal!"

Over the plain, towards the château, under the oaks and elms, a light suddenly danced out, as if borne by Friar Rush. But it was a lantern carried by Laubardemont, though he risked to advertise his movements, but he deemed that preferable to stumbling into a ditch and breaking neck or limb.

On seeing him ascend, Joseph rose and blocked his path, whereupon the lantern-bearer saluted him and said, breathlessly:

"Please you, he has gone, with the lass."

"Good! Hie you into the mansion and satisfy your prodigious appetite—but not a breath

about the marquis' disaster! Let his corpse announce the dread tidings! You said the body was on the last march?"

"It might have caught up with me, for the mules to the litter were excellent, and as the commander of the escort is a military man no time would be lost."

"Go; and lay you down to sleep, too, if you can!"

Pleased to be quit of the novel duties imposed upon him this evening, the Capuchin's man left his lantern, on the sign to do so, and trudged off as briskly as he dared without a guide for his feet.

"As the girl is now on the route to be shipped to the Indies," said Joseph coolly, "I will see that the port-captains are notified of the necessity to expedite her transportation. My friends on the Admiralty Board will oblige me there. This is all less burdensome than to manage Armand. How will he take an action counter to his inclination? how, indeed? There are some trees which will not be bent askew even in their sapling state! As a child, he was difficult to turn as a bull-calf."

Hooking his lean finger in the lantern's iron ring, he went up to the cave. With his head on his folded arms, seated, and wrapped up in his gown, Simon slumbered—or he might be hiding tears.

The monk paused, before arousing him, to give a last look at the scene. The mists had risen to this level, so that he could peer under their stratum and see as far as the house ground-floor. From kitchen and refectory the stream of light showed that the domestics were at supper.

"The next feast will be the funeral one; but

they will regale just the same. A change of lord—a change of yoke!”

Pierre Laubardemont's tall figure stood up like a perpendicular bar on his nearing the window glare.

“Though he is ready to burst with the news, he durst not let it out,” continued the Capuchin, “after my admonition. Indeed, his entrance makes no difference in the mirthful clatter—no lowering of the lights.”

As he turned round, at last, to address his friend, a moving speck in the horse-chestnut vista met his sight.

“A rider!” exclaimed he. “A courier of the funeral, preceding the corpse? No, this would not be the proper road. This rider diverges into the forest, too! Thus rides a highwayman, not desirous to be seen. I lose sight of him now! Confusion! Hark.”

A horse whinnied; those in the stables answered. A dog or two whimpered, interested.

“The animals knowing him—he is no stranger here—at least his steed is not. Ha! it is towards the Burnt Wood that the shadow steals—scarcely does his cap overtop the sparse brush! That is a plumed hat, not a servant's cap! metal flashes about his person—it is a soldier under that horseman's cloak. He stops! It is to tie up his horse. He is traversing the woods, in the murk, free as a phantom! odd, in a cavalier, booted and spurred!”

With wondrous vision, straining it, he noted these facts, and concluding that he might be seen likewise, he put out his lantern light.

“This cavalier is making for Ramire's cottage. It cannot be Laffemas, who has let her slip and hunts back to recapture! Nay, nay! it is another and quicker-stepping—taller and

more slender man! Depend on it, it is that boy! Armand, distrustful of his envoy, or merely eager to confirm the fatal, extravagant promise he advanced."

He rapidly thrust in his head at the doorway.

"*Alerta*, Simon! I must run to Ramire's cot to see that she has certainly departed."

"Yes," replied the hermit faintly, without other token that he breathed.

Joseph girded up his frock with the rope, felt that his sandals were firm, and dashed into the furze as fearlessly as a Highlander. He remembered if he could not discern the path amid boulder and briar, for he had often wandered over all this tract when he was instructing the Bishop of Luçay for his functions and teaching botany to Armand's sister Nicole before she, too, took holy orders.

He was first to reach the cottage, for he heard the stranger crashing through the under-wood, more impatient to arrive than he had been.

"I am in time," gasped he; "now, master yourself, Joseph! If this be our hothead one will need superhuman coolness and some ingenious falsehoods."

On touching the cottage door, he found it ajar.

"They left in haste," thought he.

"Miserable hovel!" as he struck his head against the low door-top. "If Simon be a prophet in agreeing with the Bishop and me that Armand is destined for the State helmsman, then, what a mean place for the future of France to be decided in!"

CHAPTER III.

A LIE AGAINST LOVE.

The junior lieutenant of the Richelieu Regiment, in Piedmont, Armand Duplessis, was impatient, overbearing, impetuous, overflowing with ingenious suggestions and novel ideas disarranging his superiors' equanimity; good old warriors they, who had burned out their fires under Henry the Fourth, and now asked no fiercer warfare than long sieges and comfortable winter quarters.

So he chafed at the rebukes and chilly reception of his best conceptions and as his heart became surcharged with first love memories, this youth of twenty oftener sighed for home than for entrance into the town before which the army sat.

"Homesick!" said one veteran. "Heartsick!" said another, who had boys of his own in the camp.

"That lad," said a keener observer, "will not long be a slave to any passion, even the master one. He is born to over-rule, to lord it, to tyrannize!"

"Camp-fever!" pronounced the surgeons who flew to bleed him.

He had become so truly a thorn in their side, with his irritating hints and pieces of advice, inherent, gathered from reading, or learnt of his father, the League Captain, that all hailed his asking home-leave for two months, and it was gladly signed and countersigned as if he were their messenger of victory.

"If he lives, and does not get his pate cracked for thrusting his sword into every medley," said a greybeard artillerist, "he will be the crowning marplot and stirrer-up of innumerable intrigues. He wants to make a cannon of steel! as if iron was not good enow for the blundering cannoneers of our times! steel for halberd-heads and swords—but for great guns! malapert!"

"Malapert! he should be a wasp at court!" said the chief surgeon. "He besought me not to give hopeless cases stimulants that they may dictate messages home or will their property—but opiates, so that they may pass through an unnatural sleep into the natural one of death! As well be Chinese!"

So Armand had ridden off with an ironical "Good cheer!" all alone, as he had despatched his lackey-orderly some days in advance, but he heeded not the pillagers who hung about the town and camp and fell upon either side indifferently.

But the young man, in his cuirass over the buff jerkin, his rapier clanking on his boot, his protruding holsters—which had a bottle of Spanish wine in one and not the companion pistol—his martial mien, inherited, for this trait had skipped Alphonse—the early melancholy which converted his face into a mask of bronze, and his daring of the solitary—all looked a tough morsel to the sharks of the land, and not once was there raised the cry of "Stand, for your life!"

It was he whom Joseph saw dimly riding into his family manor, but avoiding his father's home.

He strode into the woods, as had been seen,

after attaching his charger to a tree in a beech glade well known to him.

So light is the sanguine lover's step, that he did not feel as impediments his weighty boots, which the mud of Touraine made still more heavy, or the huge spurs.

The wood was as dark as silent. In the like darkness was plunged the house, but from the lower part came a subdued hum of gaiety which made Armand sadly smile.

"All is well under the dear roof!" thought he. "Nobody is at home, I gather from the jollity. The menials would not carry on under that press of canvas if Alphonse the Saintly or Henri the Blustering were there. The priestly brother will wax fat in time in some pleasantly located monastery where the trout stream runs through the kitchen and the woods are full of fat bucks; and the fiery marquis will break his neck, leaping out of a boudoir—reprobate that he is! though I say it! Am I to succeed them? It looks so fated! What kind of a master do the domestics forecast of me? Laffemas does not like me, and I suspect he is roguish. I, the master! I, a boy—but stop! a boy is hardly a boy on the verge of the great, deep sea, Matrimony, if not yet a man!"

He stopped, forced to retreat or cut his way through a mass of briar, ivy and vines, where a new thought struck him, for he said, like one who indulged in soliloquy because he rarely found a meet confidant:

"What will the county families say to this new countess, sprung up like a wild flower in their midst? What priest will dare wed us—certainly not one of their chaplains! I suppose the Holy Father would recall my father's

services on the wrong side and never allow a special mandate!"

He laughed lightly enough but arousing an owlet, which wailed pitifully at the disturbance; this mock echo made him shudder.

"But Simon would run the risk! What risk to one who lives regardless of the world? He likes the girl—he instructed her so that I am often astonished at her conversation. I will have recourse to him if Alphonse will not fasten the tie! She shall be another's—never! by my name!"

He shivered again; it seemed to him that a bloody sword—his eldest brother's, shot across the path he was clearing.

"Henri is rigid on such points!"

He hewed a way to where the woodcutters had made a track with their more powerful bill-hooks.

"Shame! They have been felling the majestic trees again!" he grumbled, irritated by the thorns which bristled on him. "Henri has wanted more money! What an aroma of dead leaves—what splinters which the faggot-binders disdained! How our poor soldiers freezing in camp would like these chips! Yes, here is a large fire, like a plot in Tophet, where the noble giants' remains were consumed! The blackened stumps flourish their maimed arms like the slaughtered monsters in chivalric poems! That spendthrift Henri will never be cured by Alphonse's sermons or the sager Father Joseph's monitions. Those splendid oaks have been transmuted by a necromancer-money-lender into gewgaws for a court beauty's bedizenment! If Alphonse had the cutting, we should be little the better, as Father Joseph would have taken his share for a refuge

or retreat for misanthropes. He hates man and woman! never should I beg *him* to marry me and Ramire!"

A great mass of blackness loomed up, shutting out the prospect.

"I suppose my man has delivered my message, which was calculated to lift that poor girl to rapture. He will be at home, sleeping, forgetting his master, probably braving the camp fevers! But she will not sleep well! Nevertheless, it was an old agreement with Laffemas that he should wait every night when I was due, under that giant hornbeam, for an hour after nine."

The shadow was that of a wide-reaching tree, monopolising a hundred feet on all sides.

"That defied the axe! Good!" He whistled three times, as one calls for the gamekeeper to finish the wounded deer.

"No answer?"

He sounded a repeater-watch, which would have denoted his degree, had any one heard its tinkle.

"He forgot the agreement, or stole away frightened in the darkwood. Norbert is no hero. He wanted to go with me, afraid of the brigands. But these sneaking varlets get through where a brave man fails. At more than one place they told me my groom had ridden on."

Contrary to his age and disposition, misgivings burdened him; but he ascribed the gloom to that in the night and the hush, unbroken in this dense undergrowth by the even breeze. The air was thick and slightly sulphurous. It seemed as if the forest fire smouldered and the warm ground exhaled mephitic vapors.

The way had become more smooth and fa-

miliar. Though the starlight was intermittently veiled by streaming clouds, he pushed on rapidly. No one would believe he had been in the saddle all day.

He stopped before that humble abode into which Father LeClerc du Tremblay had entered.

"No light—as a token that she was notified of my coming as soon as possible!" he observed in alarm. "No rushlight in the window?"

A small animal tumbled out of a heap of leaves and scuttled away into the thicket; a pair of wood doves, usually passing the night on the rafters within doors, disturbed in their new perch under the strawy eaves by his approach, cooed reproachfully as though he was author of their banishment, and fluttered with a squeaking sound in circles over his head; then, thinking he was one who had fed them, and bewildered by the dark, settled on his shoulders. He shook them off, impatient, angry!

"Was that her pet rabbit, or a hare? *Absit omen!* as we said in college—at a hasard!" said he, trying to be sprightly.

The door was ajar; not remarkable in the woods, for even in the village few precautions were taken.

"I hear breathing!" he muttered, taking hope; "she is there, but slumbering. Dreaming of our re-union, to be made firm against the world! All is well, I thank heaven!"

He strode up to the door, but stopped respectfully.

"Ramire! dearest Ramire! It is I, Armand! Your Armand! Returned more speedily than I hoped. Come out to me!"

No reply; and the breathing which he had certainly heard, was suspended.

"At this hour she would not be absent! Unless—good angel that she is, and an intelligent one to boot—she sits by the ailing mother's side or pining infant's! But I heard—methinks I hear breathing! But she could not sleep through the fervent call I made!"

He hesitated, for with all his ardor, backed by his aristocratic pretensions which overrode vulgar scruples, never had he entered without the dweller's invitation.

"But I do hear breathing," he said again, to still his objections. "It must be she!"

The countryside teemed with superstitions. He knew them, but had always laughed at them until now. Peering in at the door, gently opened, he perceived a grey figure, shrouded like the Phantom Monk, embodiment of all the spirits of the dismantled abbey. It stood between the bunk-bed in the wall, and the heavy table, silent, statuesque.

"It is not Ramire!" murmured he; a coldness paralysing his heart, for it seemed to him this ghostly one was praying over the dead.

He shrank back on the doorstep, clapping his hand to his rapier, not to use its blade as a weapon of physical defence but its handle as a cross to exorcise this apparition.

"No," said a voice he well knew as his tutor's, without the speaker moving, "it is not the peasant maid, although I believe, one whom you love, Armand!"

"Love!"

In the ascetic's mouth, the word seemed out of place; almost offensive to the lover.

"And one who loves you, dear my son, above all persons and, it follows, above all things!"

"Father Joseph!" exclaimed the lieutenant, in the tone with which Jacob's persecuted child might have said "my Brother Simeon" or "my Brother Judah."

This was so far from harmonising with his own accent, and far from reverence, either filial or like a pupil, that the monk resented it, for it was reproachfully that he continued:

"I reiterate, one who loves you! Have I not proved that, and, particularly, unto you! If I induced Alphonse to enter the Church, it was to clear the way for you to rise to second place in the family. I kept you from the same in order that you might learn other matters than are talked of in the cloisters. Alphonse is weak. For good motives, he would fritter away his portion of the estate just as Henri squanders it—question of time merely! Richelieu would disappear, all the same! You would have had little. Now, there suffices for the goldenround in Fortune's ladder, which so elevates the aspiring climber. Without knowing what you may become, you are ready for it. By your brother's renunciation and the other's death, you have the means, as you have the tuition, to play the great lord worthily."

"My brother—Henri's death!" He leaned against the doorpost; his plumes, torn by the twigs, and damp with dew brushed off them, flapping the old wood with a lugubrious sound. "A lusty man like Henri die!"

"Men pass away at any age who are unwanted here. He who brandished the sword, has perished by it: Henri has been killed in a duel."

"He that could hold his own with professors of fence!" he spoke incredulously still. "I doubt he was slain fairly!"

"Fairly or foully, he is slain."

"Is it known by whom? Let us avenge him!"

"I am a priest."

"So is Alphonse, thanks to you! You are right. You assigned me the power to fortify my natural sentiment. It is I who must avenge!"

Joseph held up his bony hand, covered with the parchment skin of ascetics and yellow as a life-prisoner's. It seemed to gleam with a serene light of its own engendering in the dark, like his eyes in the hood.

"Leave that to the Supreme Dealer-out of Justice," he solemnly said.

Accustomed to the gloom, both could trace the play of features.

Yet the windows were very small and covered with scraped horn, while the stars were entirely blotted out.

"It were better so, perchance," said the young man; "the Power you bring in to intervene, knoweth that I came not here to draw the sword."

"But to offer the marriage-ring!"

"How now!" he gasped, breathlessly as though a phantom spoke.

He had always held Du Tremblay in awe; now he was appalled by him.

"The blood may well boil in your cheek. You come from the stage of honor to offer wedlock to a peasant's child! I am glad that heaven directed me—permits me to prevent—"

"Hold! Prevent me! You are a Du Tremblay but I, a Duplessis! Prevent, forsooth!"

"'Dissuade' is a word, then, which should not enflame your choler. I traveled, to learn that you were going astray, and I purposed going on to the army to dissuade you from that

fell design. Folly! folly, at all time, but since you are become the Marquis of Richelieu, it would be a crime to your line, your position, and to the King himself, who upholds the purity of the patricians. A Richelieu wed with a Ramire!"

"Father, she is worthy of a coronet! Who knows? perhaps a worthier race had issued to rejoice France from Gabrielle d'Estrées than the Medici!"

"Of unknown parentage!"

"Why may she not, then, spring from a noble stem?"

"A Bohemian, her mother!"

"The Bohemians are a distinct race; they possess a king and their own nobility; you yourself taught me that they are probably descendants, very unmixed, of the oldest Oriental races. Her mother stood high in the tribe."

"I grant you what you like about her mother; that is hazy; but her father?"

"You know so much, Father Joseph," said the young man, entering and seating himself on the table edge in bravado, to undo the effects of his first trepidation and to try to show that he no longer held his tutor in apprehension; "who is her father?"

"An old simple soldier."

"Bravo! In the wars, I learnt that bearing a sword handsomely places all on a level."

"One who committed some crime, driving him into seclusion in his natal village; dying there, he abandoned his child to the vagrant mother. But for a kinsman who snatched the poor child from such hands—rather say, talons—after a toilsome hunt, Ramire would be begging or fortune-telling—running the risk of a

whipping in a corrective asylum or at the cart's-tail!"

Armand struck the board furiously with his fist, at imagination of such a fate being possible to his beloved.

"You see that her ancestry cannot be enrolled on the Golden Book of this country," sneered Joseph.

"It matters not. Mine is, or shall be. I love her, as one worships the brightest star in the incalculable nebulae, that is, the one singled out as brightest. What care I for the clouds, emanations from a bog—this earth—which cannot tarnish such lustre? In a word, Joseph—Father Joseph, for you have been father and brother to me in my isolation, being one whom no one tries to comprehend—I have pledged—"

"Tut!" said the Capuchin, apparently unaffected by the affectionate appeal, "a promise of that kind, from a nobleman to one afar beneath him! Its very magnitude makes it ridiculous and annuls it, like the preposterous sums a madman promises out of a moderate estate. Our courts are presided over by sages who do not approve of vows extracted from minors and lovers, the less when the lover is a minor!"

"Ramire is an angel," cried Armand, kissing a hood which hung on a wooden pin, "and I am the Lord of Richelieu!"

"An angel! I pray that you may meet her next—among her kind!"

The sarcasm was spoken so coldly that it diminished its meaning.

The lieutenant jumped down and clenched his fists.

"What do you mean? It is clear that she is gone, and that in her stead stand you, of

all men, who abominate woman! But you would not dare, on the land of my fathers—”

He divined that the other was smiling, but not with what sense.

“You would not be so inhuman as to have her put away! In a convent, that wood-dove! You are not a raven to prey on the dove! You would not treat her so unkindly that she has fallen ill? A sensitive woodland flower, Joseph! Is she ill—dying—do not say that Ramire—my Ramire, one and only—is no more!”

The monk leaned across the table its whole length, resting both hands on it; it was the attitude of one lecturing from an unfolded map under him; he looked into the inquiring eyes and firmly responded:

“To you, my poor Armand, she is dead! As there was socially, now distance separates you actually!”

“A matter of leagues! As I crossed the other space, so will I cross this! Banished, poor maid? I will rejoin her. What is a journey, however long, when at the goal is such a prize?”

Partly to himself the Capuchin observed:

“There is no cure, unless a master-passion swallows up this one, like Aaron’s rod did the magicians’. Armand, listen—”

The young man had wheeled round toward the door as if to rush out.

“You are a peer; you may be a duke, for you are equipped for the highest station as I prepared you. You are rich; for I was reviser over that treacherous steward who plundered your waste-thrift brother, and I made him disgorge what he had cunningly stolen. Rich and noble, well-informed, with an inkling of warfare, too, the course is clear to you. But, as

in that race at Rome, the steed must be dis-embarrassed of useless trappings, to win! What more useless than sentiment—love, adoration of mere beauty? For what a prize—the Premiership over France—the France that may be!”

“Is there happiness, too?” asked the young man, scoffing.

“Worship Ambition!” continued the monk, without noticing the interruption. “Be her slave, and she, more bounteous than Fortune herself, and less fickle, will fill your helm with solid treasures. War would only be-laurel it, and perhaps dent it with some cruel blow from which the brain would never recover. While Cupid, as you may have seen in the library that picture by an Italian hand, makes it merely the incense-dish in honor of Venus!”

The young Richelieu listened in impatience, like a horse-rider to his master’s instructions, while fretting to be off.

“Since Ramire is not dead,” said he, “what has befallen her?”

“Can you bear the truth?”

“I have borne the shock of meeting you in her place!” was the reply, as though he had met a satyr where a nymph was expected.

The Capuchin did not flinch at the uncomplimentary words.

If he were vindictive he knew that he could give a reprisal with sufficient pain.

“Could you hear that she were dead?”

“Dead! You are talking about a child! A lovely creature in faith and devotion! Well, she is more fit for paradise, whence she came straight to regale this hamlet than for a world where the All-merciful’s priest tortures! Go on, as long as she be not dead!”

"She was young, but since Satan is allowed to rove this earth, he devours by choice the young and tender. This is a world of deceit wherever his kingdom extends."

"Do you couple Ramire and deceit? I break the foul bond!"

"It is a bond which will compress your heart to bursting, I fear! Ramire is false to you, just in the way you might have anticipated."

"Joseph, you go too far! If you were not a priest—"

"In our class," slowly went on the other, without any shrinking at the anger, "when our adored is suspected, suspicion flies to alight on our next friend, our dearest other-self! He knew the flame if we concealed it—he fanned it to enjoy himself when the radiance was at the zenith."

"I have no confidants," replied Armand, proudly, as an eagle might, with speech, declare that he did not soar in flocks. "I have been brought up alone, you know. You were my sole companion till I turned myself loose, disgusted—I say it now—at your preaching for the trampling of every tie which trammelled man in a planned pursuit! At your hatred of mankind—or was it solely womankind? Henri was always friendly as Alphonse was amiable—I say that for him, until on my refusing to accompany him on his adventures, a sort of page to carry posies and the lute to a lady-love, he banished me to the camp therefore, but at your instigation, it appears. Was that because I mocked at being a choir-boy to our brother the Bishop! Between those two stools, you would push me down—whither God knows!"

"To proceed," said the monk with exasperat-

ing calm, having patiently listened to this long outburst, "when the sweetheart is a common body and her admirer an exalted one, if she turn false, one at the outset accuses—"

"For shame! Do not talk of accusing that girl! She could not be misled by the Father of Guile himself! Why pause, when you pinch me like the Cretan athlete in the oak? Faulty am I, but at least, along the River Loire, is there a cavalier superior to Armand?"

"Who was your go-between?"

"No one, I tell you."

"You were on military duty, Armand; you must have sent her missives, tokens, trophies, perhaps! Appointments were made—"

"Oh, a servant," contemptuously. "That fellow Jean Laffemas, the miller's boy—"

"Traditionally, the miller is a rogue! This time his son is one, surely. A notable sly fox!"

"I chose him sly and secret to keep my secret close. True! moreover, my Joseph who knows little of love matters, he is a newly-married man—he was partial to a lover!"

The poor boy stammered, too confused to find sound arguments to bolster up a tottering trust.

"Married, perforce, remember!" retorted the cold and bitter voice out of that impalpable, scarcely definable form in the gloom, for here as without all was swiftly darkling like the clammy terror enveloping the youth's heart. "You, autocratic brother, who would have made a good adviser at the elbow of the Grand-Duke of Russia, matched badly and without the least consideration for the feelings—admitting they have feelings to be considered—of his peasants!"

"But Laffemas look up to Ramire! I say,

look up! A prince might! Pan himself, if he haunted these thickets, would have lowered his wanton gaze and let her pass unfrighted!" declared Richelieu, recovering some fire if not coolness. "Laffemas! a promising lad, but he could not appreciate a Ramire, far less charm her! The 'prentice astrologer ogles Diana, but it is sure that she does not bend her bow to shoot a ray at the clown! She was all loveliness and had a lovelier disposition than all the fine dames of the province! I grant you, Joseph, my brother, my father, my teacher, that Laffemas might have looked up to her, for zounds! we have taste in our bourg! But purely on peril of his ears, as the sower looks up at the evening star when sowing in the change of the moon! But he, to pay his addresses to her—"

He banged the doorpost with his fist and uttered an oath, specimen of the camp vocabulary, which drowned a gust of the rising wind.

"I taught you to doubt, and you trusted! You have been fooled up to the hilt, my poor pupil! Simply, she has run off with your man-Jack—it is positive!"

Armand burst into hollow laughter and sprang to sit upon the table where he swung his feet saucily, like a pert page.

"Good father, much fasting has driven you mad!"

Joseph lifted his sleeved arm as if to appeal to heaven, when far-off lightning lit up an expanse as by drawing over it a luminous sheet.

"Ramire, who had delicacy like a princess, and a Laffemas! Ha! Ha!"

"My son, Laffemas came—you will see whether I am well informed—with a message from your hand, this evening—"

"Then he has been a sluggard! but certainly I sent a message to her—"

"It terrified her, as he had been terrified on the way by surprising the contents—"

"It might terrify him, for a lord's secrets are fearful to keep; but why should it thus affect her?"

"For the crisis had come to both. He was your courier, and he added to her, as a final argument, that they must act with promptness; bearing in mind that the marquis' death would make you lord over all the estate—"

"You overshoot the mark! The news was not known in camp up to my departure, mark! I met no mournful faces on the road," continued he suspiciously. "How was my messenger to know this?"

"Like ancient slaves, our swains have peculiar methods of spreading news. The statesman who discovers them and contracts them to his own profit will be grandissimo among rulers. This by the way. Your varlet picked up the news at some roadside inn, perhaps at our River House, where boatmen and servingmen exchange what hints will best further their robbing masters by water and on land. At all events Jean Laffemas came here, peradventure, the only person, except myself and my informant, aware of your loss. Therefore, he could readily assure Ramire as well that you would arrive shortly as that you would be in the position to force her and him asunder and drive her into any course to consummate your amourette. To begin with, you would separate them, send him back to the frontier where he would be pressed into one of those forlorn hopes, with a soldier attached to him to shoot him as by mischance in the medley!"

"I am not interested enough in my footboy to propose his murder," returned Armand, dryly, but stilled into immobility by the gravity of the conversation's turn.

Du Tremblay was a noble like himself and seemed to properly value the results of one making a misalliance.

"She has grown up with this boor. They have shuddered in the evening as the owl's prolonged hoots echoed down the glade and she has shrunk upon his breast. They have listened to the nightingale in the early spring morning, as they collected dew, for your sainted mother's toilet—God rest her! Who had not a weakness but wishing to be belle of the county all-a-lifetime! In short," he abruptly said, like an angler who, after playing, gave the line a tautening motion, "Ramire has thought of her heart alone, as rustics will! She chose for companion for life the one who was her childhood's, and as I have told you, they have left Richelieu forever!"

"My man, with no fear of me! My love, with no affection for me!" groaned the young noble, burying his face in trembling hands.

"They who plucked the hips and haws together are now seeking grapes on the thorns plenteous in sin and desolation's way! For this turncoat Laffemas is a married man!"

"Monstrous!" cried Armand, stamping his heavy boot; "unnatural! So fair, so gentle, so sweet a girl that the August sun would not scorch her beauty at this door. A child! For it was scarcely more than yesterday that she stood no higher than my pony's stirrup to offer me in the woodland a nosegay of its blooms. Ah! those flowers, like her most fresh and

pure, but so soon wilted that I could not long wear them on my heart!"

"All fades," said Joseph's deep voice, "all perishes! Look not to things earthly if you seek the Everduring!"

The calm was over without; the rising breeze bore from the manorhouse a confusion of coarse laughter, rough songs and music, and applause of thumping feet and cries of "*Noël!*"

"Laubardemont is telling them some droll town story," thought the priest.

"Father," said the lieutenant with voice unsteady, "how do you know about this flight, all, like one standing by? Surely, holy man though you are, being by, you would have struck down the hireling stealing the sweets marked down by his master? This is villainy, no doubt, which seeks the covert and seldom has hearers!"

"You are right, my son! I came here, ignorant of all—death of your brother and death to your hopes! On the village skirts, I met mine own servant, who had ridden with spur and whip to acquaint the house with the news how Henri had met death. I was about to send you and Alphonse a dispatch, call your sister out of her nunnery, summon a family council in your name, when the Castle Hill hermit intercepted me—"

"Ah, that snail comes forth from his shell to stay the good work?"

"Simon it was to whom the escaping maid had turned to procure funds for the flight—her own. You know he is the Jew, the banker, the custodian of savings as of secrets for all the rude neighbors. To him, you see, holy man, money is dross! He charges no interest for its keep, and such his high reputation for sanc-

tity that no robber durst penetrate his cell any more than Barabbas would invade the Tabernacle."

"Yes," muttered Armand, brooding, "she would have money laid up—there, I daresay—much, for I added to her store, wishful she should not too early lack dainty food, the current song and story books, finer laces of the smuggling-chapman than she can work, trinkets to which I want her accustomed—in fact, she laid up, as we jested, for a *reigning* day!"

"A rainy day, for which you feathered the nest where another will be sheltered from the storm! Poor Armand! With hypocritical pretence that her money was needed to pay out her mother's soul from perdition, she drew it! More hypocritically still, she begged the recluse's blessing on her journey to her mother's burying-place, at last discovered, she asserted. And so, made her reverence!"

"But with money it was less likely she would travel alone? A girl can scarcely travel afar without guard, without duenna, as they say in Spain?"

"You have hit it! She was not going without attendant. At the inn she was to meet a guide, an old aunt, decrepit, venerated by the gipsies, all of whom would assist the pair—"

"You see, the other story is fabulous! It is filial affection! She goes with a kinswoman!" cried the young man. "She is innocent! the other supposition was infamous! Unfounded! Scandalous!"

"A gipsy, under the Crossed Oars! A pagan, at the Boatman's Arms! Come, come, the host is a receiver of stolen goods, the guests are poachers and smugglers; but they would

not harbor a heathen! This was her tale! I told you that she went off with your man!"

"With him! Into Spain! Still, if there—" clinging to the clue for his Ariadne's sake.

"Oh, the traitress would say anything to mislead!"

"In Spain, or wherever I find him, I will have this Laffemas beaten out of recognition by the mother who bore him. I will drag him home and then run him out with hounds, on market-day, from the cross to the parish confines!"

"Both are beyond hounding," said Joseph curtly, passing around to the door as if to close it as the wind brought the savor of tempest.

"Patient as the panther," said the disconsolate man, "I pursue!"

The wind shut the door and the Capuchin stood before it.

But, as happens when the wind rises, merry-makers raise their voices, and they still heard Laubardemont's song.

"A merry song, in the mouth of one who brought that mortal news?" said Armand.

"He has not told it!"

"Why not? What mysteries! Who is the lord here in the interregnum of Henri and Armand?" said Richelieu haughtily. "He shall have my opinion on one who sings thus over the dead lord! But my horse is rested; I must out, upon their road!"

"Stop!"

"Father, even you must not stay me!"

"Your brother's corpse, *that* bars the road!"

He opened the door. Armand advanced, but recoiled.

"Hark! If you have ears for other sound than that siren's voice!"

A distant churchbell tolled. On the stormy

wind, fitfully came notes of a strident trumpet and a monotonous drum; the young officer well knew the funeral march of a soldier.

"My brother!"

Overhead all was dark now. Like the silver tears on a pall, a few stars, momentarily uncovered, glinted faintly.

Joseph dropped on his knees, to pray, leaving the passage altogether free. But Armand reverently joined him in the prayer, although standing, and inclining forward like a hound in the leash, ready to spring spite of chiding.

But the wind soughed so woefully in the woods, the ilex and elms waved so dolefully, and the clamor of the women who had added themselves to the procession, to be rewarded (as was the usage) on arriving at the great house, was so touching that the heir bowed his head and bent the knee.

"Henri is coming home for the last time," whispered the Capuchin in his ear, they being on the level. "Stay, at least, to cast the clod and the sprig of evergreen upon his coffin!"

"On his burial morning, I leave home, for the last time, then!"

"Wilful that you are!" said the priest, but not without a strange admiration.

"Revenge, saith the Italians, is a dish sweetest eaten cold," returned the youth with little of Christian spirit before his instructor in piety.

"Revenge on a low-born lass and a lackey! That is a meat for equals to sup on. A gipsy and a plowboy! Fie, Armand! The Marquis of Richelieu degrades himself already!"

Often as now the priest's words were bitter without the tone being so. He saluted him,

on taking his title, like one gentleman to another, without mockery.

The other quivered with rage; the chant of the priests seemed to madden him!

"Before the grass grows on that new grave, I will have them dragged back at the horses' tail! From the realm's confines, from over the border, if our name finds an echo at the Court! Lashed all the way to where they were born, and on the land to which they turned traitors! I would I could bury them alive, under the smoking ashes of this cottage, which the fires of heaven should kindle and consume for being my heart's funereal urn! Oh, had my wish been otherwise, how oft would we two have paid a pious pilgrimage-visit hither to view where we first caught a glimpse of Eden! Oh, that deceit should crawl in here, to tempt that maid of peerless mould, of luscious but lying lips! Stand aside! They shall not enjoy their triumph! I forget all, until I shall have washed my hands in their blood!"

"Hold! Bring them back from where they hide their shame! Preposterous idea! Better they should perish, remote, in lowliness befitting their condition! Whatever the charge trumped up to obtain their return, will they not deny it? Their silence even would find a hundred voices in others, too, of their herd, to bruit that my lord was jealous—of his foot-boy, forsooth! That the new sultan was doubly duped! Ha, ha!" laughed the monk, with as little feeling as the brazen head of magicians. "What will the Estates of Touraine say to their latest member, so blind that a chit of a girl and a lout not many weeks promoted from the plowhandle to the varlet's clothes-brush—they cheated him in fulness! Riche-

lieu will be a by-word! The laughing-stock—the peg on which to hang a lewd ballad such as my ungodly man is halloaing there in the teeth of the funeral train! You will be condemned to enter the Church, or remain a bachelor, and you may not seek the town, for the players along the Seine-side will be enacting farces about ‘the Master who was Rival to his Squire!’ ”

“By the hallowed Death!” swore Armand, like his old troopers.

“You cannot flee, like they have! Whither would you flee whence you must not return some day for your duties, whereupon, look you! the first tenant who came to kiss your hand would stop to conceal his well-worn grin on remembering your being gulled!”

“Oh, holy sir! You might be content with lacerating me, but not pour boiling pitch on the weals!”

“To heal! Armand, you would be a blighted man, and the house—the house your father lifted so as to be even with the mightiest, would be down in the mire for a century!”

“True!” said the young man tenderly, for he idolised his father. Then, loftily and severely as never before to his preceptor, “I stay through the obsequies; whereon I shall act on the fruit of inquiries toward an end—one to make me feared, not ridiculed!”

“To make inquiries looks like doubting me!” said the monk, but with his usual unconcern.

“After doubting a Ramire, I doubt everybody!”

He sprang out of the house as if suddenly aware of its containing deadly contagion.

Joseph gathered up his gown and rapidly overtook him,

"Whither go you if not to precipitate yourself after the runagades?"

"To the hermitage, to put a question or two to Father Simon."

The Capuchin drew a breath in relief.

"You could not do better; by his office and his practice as comforter, he will afford you peace."

"Peace, to this heart!" said the lieutenant, beating his breast. "Replace that fledgling, tossed out of the nest by the gale, and expect it to thrive!"

"After seeing the good man, what follows?"

"I know not; but Richelieu will stand at his place by his brother's pall, as the prayers are spoken over him."

"That suffices for a brother noble, but not for a noble brother!"

"Father, if Ramire be the miserable self-castaway you describe, rejecting and trifling with a love like mine, my titles, my future—for, sir, I felt I had a future when Love drew the curtain and waved its torch on the obscurity beyond—if she spurns me in favor of a clown—well, look you! I shall be grossly mistaken on this life of mortal man. I and the world will fly asunder as the broken handle from the sword; I shall be detached from things as these leaves from the bough and those limbs from the trunk! I held to my prospects as the antique culprit to his rock, but, this time, I shall let it roll back and crush me!"

"All for a girl! Woman, woman, here be buried two men in a week, for your worthlessness withal! Poor Henri!"

"Poor Ramire!"

"At all events, you will be at the funeral?"

Armand looked round as if seeing the scene for the first time.

The showers of a storm's front were falling finely. The drops beat on the leaves like tattoo of an immense fairy host. A strange light pervaded all, the grey tone of burnt roses, delicate, pleasingly sad, mysterious, not repulsive, suggesting renascence not annihilation. The wailing was under cover now, no doubt in the chapel, and the muffling made it musical and less doleful. Already a pool, fed by some deep channel, was swelling and its surface, changing color with dyes from the earth dissolving, reflected fitting and minute rays as from glow-worms or deadwood. As the Cadet of Richelieu gazed, even these were blotted out by the spreading grey.

The chapel bell sounded as if never to stop; melancholy filled his heart like that of one who had not a support to grasp at. It had been fraught with joy and hope, but so isolated is a lover when he is a wronged one, that he felt entirely alone.

"See!" said Joseph in a sweet voice, such as a prelate uses to the novice taking the black veil, "nature weeps with us. Do nothing rashly. Why breast this deluge? Rather get you in, and there await the hermit. I will send him to you! Pray meanwhile for oblivion, which is a kind of peace, and he will come, haply, to seal it with heaven's!"

Armand seemed confounded by the blank of nature; submissively, mechanically almost, he let himself be pushed toward the cottage where he abruptly entered as if invisible hands seized him. Imagining in the redoubled gloom that blissful form which the bold accusation had dissipated, he burst into tears. Clasp-
ing his

hands, he sank upon a stool, with his head bowed, his insupportable grief mastering other emotions.

"He weeps; but that is no disgrace in a mere boy, fatigued by a long ride! It will save him from frenzy, during which he might have cut a throat!" thought the monk, confidently hurrying away over the ground slippery with the rain, which he defied in his cowl and gown. "He is saved from worse—he might attempt self-murder! But our task is only begun! He would not listen to me! Has Simon a wilier tongue?"

The rain poured in torrents as he reached the sanctuary.

CHAPTER IV.

A GOOD HEARER MAKES A FINE SPEAKER.

In spite of the tempest the good hermit seemed not to be astonished at the re-appearance of his brother in the creed. Nor was he filled with surprise on hearing that, after the first outburst, and the wrathful expression of his desire to follow the fugitives, Armand had been calmed by grief, shown in those tears which one of the Latin races has no compunction to shed in another man's presence upon a great emotion mastering him.

"Were you cruel to him, brother?" demanded he, somewhat sternly.

The lover of one's child can never be indifferent to father, or grandsire.

"Who loves well, chastises well," responded the Capuchin, like a Flagellant Friar.

"I am glad he is calmed—his thirst for revenge assuaged by tears."

Joseph replied no more, but watched the other.

"But what are you holding? It looks like a phial of cordial. Simon, Simon, you are not addicted to stimulants of your distilling, in your lonely watches, are you?" said the Capuchin with an effort at jesting.

"It is a medicine, as it is used—a poison, at need."

"Ah! it is your grandchild, true! Would you take your life because I took away her love?"

"No, it is not for me. It is for your pupil."

"Hand Armand poison?"

"Did you not leave him willing to die?"

"I think you are right. He had, at least, postponed the inclination to hurry in the chase and kill the pair."

"If he did not do so, without hearing your remonstrances, it is because he knew that he loved her too much! He would spare her—count on that! And, perhaps, at her entreaty, the supposed paramour. Now, he wishes to inflict the deepest wound on her—if she still loves him, you understand?—he wishes to have her haunted all her life with the idea that he slew himself for love of her, believing her untrue."

"And you would assist him in that silly purpose?"

"I shall do better than that. You want an auditor who will not interrupt you in seeking to prevail against the well-prevailing Love. I will go to him—pretend to aid him in his wicked aim, and he will drink—" holding up the phial, in the flambeau light, "thinking it is annihilation of the senses—when it will be barely suspension of them."

"Only a drug?" said Joseph, relieved.

"And a rare one, which the monks of Mount Athos never bettered in their alembics. It has the power to plunge the absorber into a sleep so like the ultimate one that the best physicians would be in doubt. Perhaps, it was extracted," went on Simon, meditatively, "from that root, by means of the juice of which the fakirs of the Ind dwell bottled up for a long period and can be revived. Who knows but the Egyptian mummies await the bearer of such a flask to be resuscitated?"

"Leave Egypt and the Ind!" said the Capuchin hastily. "I see your drift. The idea is excellent. If I can but get him to listen patiently."

"Like a stone!"

"You are sure that I should not be wasting my eloquence, like your namesake the Stylite, preaching to the monoliths?"

"Follow me to the cottage and enter when you see him rendered unresisting to your thunder!"

Wrapt in their purpose, proof to the deluge into which they had to plunge, the two men retraced the path to the girl's dwelling.

One of the horn window-panes had been dislodged by the wind. They peeped in.

"Armand is on the spot where I left him; but he has sunk on his knees! So devout, after all—pray he may not be lost to the Church!" said the Capuchin, sincerely.

"He is rising. This is the nick!"

A flash of lightning zigzagged across the dun sky as the hermit stepped within the single room and shook off the rain.

In a second flash Armand saw him, and by the third recognised his visitor.

"Plague!" said he, with affectation of levity, "has all Richelieu made a rendezvous in the poor flown pigeon's cote? Why do you intrude on me?" he fiercely added, thinking that the new-comer wore that smile of contumely which Joseph had foreseen would adorn all lips.

"Do you use that tone to me, and yet know me?" said Simon reproachfully.

"Yes, I know you, my tutor in woodcraft and the wonders of Nature! Father Simon, who need be Simon Magus to dispel my sorrow!

You are famed for wisdom, piety, honesty, charity, all that makes a bishop shunned and a hermit sought in his diocese! Unhappily, I do not want any of those balms! All, all is naught to me, you understand?"

"Why, Armand? Because you have heard of the death which makes you Richelieu?"

"I was not thinking of Henri's death—more shame to me, perhaps! The heart has its family, created after it bounds in love—the death oppressing me is in *its* family!"

Simon heaved a sigh and surprised his hearer by saying, with feeling:

"Poor Ramire!"

"Do you mock me? Do you imitate the echoes of these walls? That has been the Amen to all my prayers!"

"I do not mock you!" he removed a tear from his eye with his hand, and added: "I mourn her, too."

"Ah, she was really, then, so good as to make you deplore her flight?" said the young man, interested for the first time.

"I deplore any flight of a soul, even toward heaven, for it is one missing from the army which on earth wages eternal war with Satan. But there is more in her departure to pierce my heart, like your own, than you imagine. You said you knew me as your tutor when I came in. Know, now only, that I am her grandfather."

"I ought to have guessed that! Ramire often told me how limitless was your kindness! You brought her up like a princess' daughter—bless you for that, though she throws away the pearl!"

"Yes, I must have shown her more than

Christian loving-kindness. She was my only tie to life."

"Tell me—her father—was he lowly born?"

"Her father was Blaise—"

"The old soldier turned wood-cutter—"

"The reprobate, who led a dissolute life and died of wounds received battling with your father's keepers over a doe killed out of season; her mother—"

"Yes, yes, her mother?"

"Was, like him, an arrant law-breaker, gipsy by every deed, and a Spanish one at that, who had redoubled Oriental craft with Moorish subtlety."

"I see that you leave me no hope. But it is enough that you believe her so wicked!" In a tone of despair which made the other shiver, he uttered: "I see that you do not blame me—since I have not driven her from this home! On the contrary, I came to offer my hand in holy marriage—"

Simon pretended surprise too great to let him speak.

"Yes; you taught her to be my equal; but she, of her birthright, daughter of the vagrants who spurn all bonds, has resumed their vagrant life. Let me show I have better profited by your tuition!"

"How, Armand?" said the old man, tenderly, for he could not but regard with weakening eyes the young noble who contemplated such an act as a marriage beneath him.

"Your Church is Nature's; but you live in sympathy with that which stands heavy on the land in severe majesty—my brother Alphonse's. Let me cancel the boon of learning which I owe to you by giving up all I inherit

to that Church, when I am laid beside my brother the marquis."

"That would be long to await—"

"Not so! I dead, Alphonse is master here."

"He renounced all."

Armand smiled sarcastically.

"I doubt not that the Ecclesiastical Court will find a way to pass the estate on to him, bar that!"

"Be that as it may, what are you bent upon? Throwing away your life in the wars, rather than on the highway, seeking our poor Ramire?"

"No. Here! Not so romantically! I beg of you some of that drug for which we gathered the plants in the moonlight."

Simon started; it was not often that he had known the same thought to attack two persons so opportunely for a trick.

"That poison?" stammered he. "I, give you poison? How do you know but that I want it for myself, in my desperation?"

"Because *you* hope to see the girl again. A grandsire may pardon all she has done and receive her in his arms at the end of her flight in folly; but with a lover—a lover like me, it is different: I cannot forgive the insult in her setting me aside in favor of one who held my stirrup!"

"I shall never see Ramire on earth again," said the hermit firmly. "In the wailing of the storm I hear a premonition!"

"Then give me the only physic to our woe."

"Die, with this estate at your feet? With the future so brightly dawning? So young that you may be consoled for this loss?"

"I die, Father Simon, because I believe, spite of all, that Ramire did love me, and may again

do so. Then she will be punished, on finding a stone, cold and speechless, over my grave, where she expected to meet a cherished remembrance which would assure her forgiveness. It is to have done with all, with her particularly, you see, that I beseech you to divert Lethe across my path."

"Why do you single me out to have a share in your crime—for Christians are not stoics—they forbid self-murder!"

"Because you had a part in my grief; you brought Ramire and me together, when girl and boy! Perhaps you divined my good and high intentions, and, being her forefather, you fanned the flame! I forgive you, though it has blackened her fame and scorches the heart out of me! The poison, father!"

The recluse drew out from the folds of his gown the rock-crystal phial which Joseph had remarked, and held it up.

"Drink," he said slowly, "while I go, alone, in quest of our lost lamb!"

He watched for the effect of this phrase on the youth, but his hand did not tremble unless with eagerness as he took the object.

"If you do succeed in finding her, tell her not how you assisted to divorce my soul and body!"

"Shall I not tell her you died, leaving a last word of forgiveness?"

"I thank you, and may you be forgiven for culminating your stainless life with this seeming crime—but, oh! how happy you make me!"

Simon blessed him with a gesture.

"When the soul is divorced from the casket, what happens?" said he, on the threshold. "We have discussed this question, and I have pondered over it, to the booming of the bit-

tern and until the piping of the quail. You will know, before me! Strange, that—in so young a man!”

“The grave?” said Armand, clasping the phial to his breast. “Perhaps, sheer silence after this noisy world, where empty talk has the ear, like the court jester.”

“In the silence, you may the better hear voices you heeded not in life!”

“As long as I am deaf to her voice, I care not.”

He relapsed into silence, frowning like a monarch who wished to be alone.

“He is bronze—he will not relent,” muttered the hermit, quitting the place.

A grey figure, gleaming with wet, was making the circuit of the cottage.

“What a time you have been!” he hissed reproachfully to Simon.

“I was wasting the time, for he would not be consoled.”

“What comfort had you for him? Did you propose going to chase after the fleeing couple in company?”

“Instead of pursuing her, he means to place himself beyond her reach if she returned.”

“Determined to kill himself?”

“He asked me for the drug which he knew about, since he and I plucked the plants in yonder glades.”

“It is a good omen that the same idea struck you both!”

“I hope so. He will drink—he will fall into a stupor, and the rest lies with yourself.”

“We will see if you are acting fairly by us both.”

At the door, which the hermit had not closed, by a flash of lightning Joseph was spared stum-

bling over what seemed Richelieu's lifeless body.

"Already?" said he. "The lightning is not fleeter!"

Something glittered on the rushes over the floor in the next flash, and the Capuchin picked it up. It was the phial, unstopped, and drained to the last drop.

He sank on his knees beside him and felt for his heart-beat.

Alarmed, he turned a pale face towards the hermit, who had returned on his path to peer in at the door.

"Has he taken an overdose! has it killed him, of a verity? Ha! Mother of Grace, defend this! but you hated him, you hated Armand for being nearer the stem than yourself! scion on the stock of which we are proud, you have thus revenged yourself for the removal of your grandchild! you have doubled the sorrow on this already grey head!"

Simon made a careless gesture.

"Save your breath, my Brother Joseph," said he, without a token of irritation even, "for your persuasive address on this fettered soul. You are a teacher who has, for a second time, though at later age, had a pupil placed under his care. This time, however, more helpless than in puberty, you have your ward delivered over to you inert, gagged and bound, and you can proceed with your instruction uninterrupted by a sound, a look, a protest in dumb-show, even! It is for you to sway him into the course which suits your intent—your policy."

"He must not be proven guilty of ingratitude to his country, his peers, or his King!" said Du Tremblay gravely, but not without warmth.

"Yes, he were worthy of a cell in the Bastile,

where your brother the Chevalier is governor's deputy, if he were to become a rustic squire, wasting his talents and his time on a series of farms, on warrens and preserves, to say nothing of a stupid wife and a cooing brood."

It was difficult for the listener, keen though he was, to determine whether the hermit was gibing or speaking simply,

He was not a good listener, to tell the truth, for he was studying the young man.

Armand lay in a trance which defied the closest scrutiny to perceive any signs of remaining life.

"He is no more?" said he, in a hoarse whisper, half-inquiry, half perplexity. "He is already cold, Simon!"

"In cold blood, in faith, he will hear you out," replied the hermit, lightly, to hide some pain, as he wavered at the doorway. "Do not hurry—there is no need. When you are done in your appealing—your arguments, your pleadings—what you will—just dash water on him. You need not go far to seek that, for the ice-brook is swelling at the door from the gathering torrent. See! it is black as ink from surging through the Burnt Wood!"

Joseph did not turn his head; if he had done so, he might indeed have seen through the slightly-parted door, held against the gust by the recluse, in the bluish glare of lightnings, a black rivulet serpentine through the devastated woods, like a reptile of jetty skin.

"Water, merely water—that will be the antidote."

"Can anyone human arouse him?" queried the Capuchin, wringing his hands and looking up incredulously.

"At will, at will, with the cold water," rejoined the retiring man testily.

"I must have faith in you since there is no choice. It is on my heart to say that you have done well, Simon, my brother! Well, if the elements in their warfare permit it, go to your cell and pray for my success! one for which, please God! our country will yet praise us! It signifies the elevation, the diffusion, the aggrandisement of our Mother-Church! of our country! of this race of Richelieu of which you may be proud! and of which without being kin, I, too, from tender ties and long alliance of our families, seek the pre-eminence!"

In his enthusiasm he had forgotten his distress about the insensible young man, and his tone rose exultantly above the roaring of the storm.

"You are rapt with joy, brother!" said Simon, wiping his face, dashed with water from the blast suddenly wrestling with his arm on the door.

"It is a foretaste of a great joy to come! Richelieu, the Chief of France!"

"Alas! your joy is my sorrow, that poor boy's despair, and the everduring unhappiness of my poor Ramire!"

"Flies on the chariot wheel must be crushed in the dust as it rolls on!" cried the monk impatiently.

But Simon had left the cottage, closing the door where the rain had beaten in during their colloquy; but, notwithstanding the tempest was almost at its height, he stood under the dripping eaves to hear the harangue to the benumbed youth.

Armand had hardly more than taken the draught, which he doubted not was deadly,

when he felt its insidious drops warm his internals and swiftly course with the blood, and even into the nervous system until his entire frame was embraced.

Then he fell as the dead; his sight sealed up so that he did not perceive the vivid lightning, while he was unconscious that the father was seeking for the throb of his blood and other indications that Simon had not indeed executed a treacherous piece of revenge.

But all his faculties were not congealed.

He could hear; and, suddenly, amid the storm at its worst, a voice, either of great power at a distance in space, or very close to his ear, made every word tell of a singular address.

"Young man (said the voice of Joseph, though he did not recognize it), you entered on the career of arms, but the clash of battle has not allured you, any more than the vain glory of the camp, from remembrance of the charming girl whom you quitted with the promise never to forget. You returned to her, to wed her, though born far below your station. Neither war nor love suit the superior energy requisite to the statesman. He who loves his country sincerely must renounce the commerce of the fair sex and the brutal medley of cannon, chargers and the pike-bearing infantry. Unless he would lose touch of the clue which leads him to the throne, to be King over the King, a prime minister must cherish no affection to divert him or yield to secondary motives. To be alone, a man in our age must be a priest.

"A priest, you must nourish this project, breathed into you during youth to become the master-impulse of your maturing period, as the

vessel never loses the potter's breath which impregnated it and moulded it although exposed to the supernal heat of the furnace.

"This project is the grand one conceived by King Henry the Fourth and finished in its elaboration by his Minister, Sully—a military and political dream annulled in his breast by the regicide's knife. It was to debase all Powers that France might stand on them as footstools; France, our fatherland, was to be the ruling spirit over Europe, supported by both branches of the Christian Church, chastened into united unity.

"The Church, you hear me? In ancient Gaul the Druid priesthood held the administration of business as the priests should now, for in their body abides the spirit of the future: Civilisation, which kings, courtiers, soldiers, the people—none other understand. But each nation should have such spiritual counsellors as grow up with it, its own sons. That is why the statesman of the time coming must, in France, oppose—nay, expel the Jesuits! The disciples of Loyola will never be loyal! Already the populace, and even the rustics, at the cue of their parish priests, chafe at their meddling, and will be ripe to back whoever represses and chastises these would-be monopolisers.

"But the Pope often sides with 'the Black Pope?' it may be so, in which case, the most faithful son of the Church may oppose the Pope.

"That is why the statesman must be a churchman. As for you, your brother Alphonse, of whom I thought what you must realise, and who sorely disappointed me, will resign his Bishopric of Luçay, so that you may step

into the stall and rise to be cardinal. The chief Cardinal in France is the Pope for our land, and that will suffice, since he must dwell in Paris, where he may be greater than the Holy Father at Rome.

"To combat your worst enemy, the Jesuits, you must, in its own manner, keep an army of spies—the Force of Intelligence—retain them by wages, devotion or terror; know all that goes on in the world; and to keep them true, let the meanest ever rely on your word.

"Thus you will be monarch—but, as the ship carrying a good captain could dispense with a figure-head, yet that is preserved because it bears the brunt in steering into action and it presents the finishing touch to the prow on gala occasions, so guard Royalty! It is the Palladium of the realm. Fortify it! so that when the hour sounds for it to be dismantled and its walls thrown down, the garrison may march out with all honors, still useful to the defence; the munitions as serviceable to the Commonwealth as when set aside for a king and his court.

"This time, we shall not see.

"As for the jewels of the Crown, the courtiers, some do nothing, some idle away or sin away their leisure, others plot when they are not harassing the tax-payers. A few are intelligent, and the others must be thrown down to be the living carpet over which they shall ride to exaltation, as those Sheriffs of Mahound who trample under hoof the great plaza-ful of worshippers!

"The princes and peers who are not fops, interested solely in the cock of a beaver hat or the curl of a plume, hunt, and encourage brutality of a darker age or misspend their hours

in evil merrymaking. They regard the kingdom as a park where they chase the base-born. Curb them—behead the tallest like poppies, whose flaring colors and haughty carriage they assume. Crush them in their cabals, out of which stream the plagues worse than Egypt's.

“Attend to the financiers. Not those great money-makers, who enrich their country and enhance its credit; their fortune in their lifetime parts into channels which promote benevolent projects and at their death oft turns to the further advantage of the realm. But press hard upon the speculators and speculators—the ‘farmers’ of the revenues, who should be made to disgorge in favor of the Treasury, all to lighten the burdens upon the rate-and-cess payers. As you must have funds for the wars—verily, to curb nobles, hold the sovereign in a bridle, and squeeze these public cormorants, this means war intestine! equalise taxation by abolishing all exemptions and privileges—always remembering the Church is an exception to all rules! other favoring clauses are founded on no reason and are not to the general good.

“You will have surplus cash, which should be applied to the Army Fund. The army, this is the power—the shining glaive of Gabriel! before it, Treason, Satan political, must recoil! Sift out those ancient leaders who encumber the paths to glory and by their lamentations dispirit recruits. Make the restless, burning-spirited officers of fortune so many Marshals of France, being the small-change of the Lord High Constable, whose office abolish! though a Montmorency holds it! It is a one-man power which must not be a stumbling-block—perhaps a headsman's block, to a prime minister. Nominally, let the King replace him,

as the Commander-in-chief, but the actual generalissimo must be a number of lieutenants, holding one another in check, like Alexander, the Great's.

"In the same way as you purify the Church of the foreigner, so purge the Army of those outlandish rodomonts, the reiters, lanzknechts, spadassins, bravoos, Switzer mercenaries! Let every soldier feel that he touches elbows with a fellow-countryman, and that his dying words will be understood by his comrade—who may bear them to parents or sweetheart unadulterated. Let him feel, as is not the case at present—you know, who have seen camp life—that wherever the shot struck him, he fell into French arms, with Frenchmen around him, for France!"

He spoke on, streaming with perspiration, for the cottage had become hot as a furnace from the storm being highly electrical, but he was almost as unconscious of the elemental warring without as Simon, drenched under the eaves, still listening, encharmed.

"With a homogeneous army," continued the enthusiast, "you may, in a lifetime, join, to France, the Low Countries, a slice of the Rhenish duchies, and then—Catalonia! some partition of Spain, which must be separated from Portugal! When you lay down the pen—the new-time sceptre of the ruler—you will be the Premier Minister who will have left a grand and mighty dominion in France to your successor!"

The hermit felt his heart warm. Then, doubt seizing him, as he summed up all he could remember of the astute, persevering tutor of the Bishop Alphonse, he murmured:

"What does this far-seeing, much-grasping

projector mean to draw into his own bag, while bolstering up this boy to take the golden apples from the dragon-guarded garden? the Court, and politicians' playground? Would he be content to be the Minister's father-confessor? I doubt that! let me hear more—"

But while he was straining the ear, mechanically shaking off the rain-sheets, for he might as well have stood under a cataract, the clouds were concentrated by a stupendous gathering of all the winds towards one point. In those black masses the potent fluid was also collected to an impossibility of the vapor still longer confining it. One sharp collision caused a tremendous explosion. The earth quaked and the trees waved as their roots vibrated. Branches fell, wrenched off as the leaves had previously fallen. A fall of rain overwhelmed the forest, bearing down the foliage, and the lightning descended upon the cottage, from the recent clearing placing it in an opening, like a colossal fireball hurled from a celestial catapult.

As if it were aimed at the huge hornbeam, it struck it in all its broad magnificence, and in a moment it was splinters, and a hole in the sodden ground, where the lately-buried clay, brought to the surface instantaneously, gleamed yellow as gold in the flashing light, alone showed where it had flourished.

Never again would the dryads listen, there, to the love-talk of Armand and Ramire! Having heaped up the fragments, the bolt scattered likewise into many portions, and chasing one another like fiery serpents, one or two darted at the cottage, and brought more in their wake.

The cottage was old; the timbers were worm-eaten and brittle with rot; the stones, hewn

without regard to their grain, were also crumbling. The shock had disintegrated them both. Now, all tottered and fell apart, like a paste-board house on the stage.

Over the heads of the preacher and his motionless auditor, the roof slid to one side from the wind; the walls toppled outwards in four directions, and that to the lee swerving round, the unfortunate eavesdropper was caught between them and crushed in their united mass.

"My child! Ramire! never again shall I—"

He died without further word.

In the midst of the reverberations, Armand rose, staggering, to his feet. The shock had overcome the narcotic, as well as the sudden coldness in the rain, no longer prevented deluging the pair by the disappeared roof.

At the same moment, the priest was about to lift him up and carry him out of the ring of ruin.

Armand looked at him, like a pythoness recovering from her draught, and said, in a voice part-strangled, wholly unearthly, with the air of unconsciousness of the storm:

"Father Joseph, I have heard you, and I obey your call, more promptly than your previous teachings. Wherefore this obedience—this eagerness and coincidence with your views? because they are ideas which leap towards the same goal as the fleetest and most spirited of mine!"

While another flash irradiated the scene, and the thunder from a former volley resounded, Joseph stared at the speaker as though, like a new Ithuriel, he had touched and transfigured a demon whom he had heretofore considered as an innocent sprite.

"I joy to hear that," faltered he, aghast. Then he muttered:

"Ambitious beyond my knowledge! what if he aims at my own mark, indeed?" The thunder crackled about them and the youth seemed to stand with a species of glory about his head, his hair rising and standing out in the wet.

"Let us hasten from the wood!" cried out the Capuchin. "The wind is whirling fragments of destroyed things about us and may overwhelm us!—as it has—"

He checked himself.

"Why do you bid me hasten and yet pause? why do you stare?"

"At nothing! Come away!"

Joseph had seen a portion of a white face, the rest crushed out of mortal likeness, in the debris of the cottage. He had guessed that the old hermit had played the spy, to his destruction.

Armand refused the hand which the monk offered, as if desirous to show that he had recovered his strength with his wits, and as if to show additionally that he was undaunted by the continuing uproar, he strode over the ruins, as one who mounted a battered bastion, and reaching the other side extended his hand to assist the other, with a commanding air.

The monk, this time, also rejected the offer, in the same way, but pretended to be embarrassed by his frock amid the shattered beams.

Side by side they stood near the gap whence the tree had been torn and shivered.

So lofty was the carriage of the young man that the monk repressed an inclination to embrace him as his pupil elect.

Richelieu bounded through the wood, where

the path was strewn with broken boughs and heaped with leaves, as well as channeled by the rushing rivulets. Joseph du Tremblay followed, become meek and submissive, like a dog which had at last found a master in a playmate. Armand pressed on, in a kind of ecstasy, as if all the scene were novel, as well as exhilarating to him. The Young Men of Ephesus, awakened to the world, after their stupor, would not have stepped out more buoyantly.

"Has he forgotten the girl—forgotten love, upon this third spur added to his own?" thought the monk.

All was dreary, though Armand was so jocund. The rain had ceased to pour, but the trees dripped and drenched the wanderers.

A large pool, where all had been dry to Ramire's foot some hours before, stopped the pair.

The young marquis turned round abruptly on his follower.

"I know now who it was you must have seen, dead, in the cottage ruins," said he. "It was Simon the hermit."

"He was listening," exclaimed the monk, as a sort of excuse for his heartlessness in not staying to succor the recluse.

"He was certainly dead!" responded Armand, gloomy as suddenly as he had become gladsome. "It is well that his is not inevitably the spy's doom," he went on sarcastically, "recalling the use you recommended the future governor of France to make of espionage!"

Inside the hood, drawn up and over to keep out the showers from the trees, a sound was heard, probably the monk's laugh.

He was proud of his pupil, again.

"To the château," said he in a light tone. "I

have a cavalier's suit of black in my valise, which will serve for your mourning."

"Ah! Father Joseph," said the other, taking him by the arm to aid him to cross the pool, "you fear to trust me out of your sight? You are not right! but keep with me! Keep with me all my life, and you will see things to which the events of this night are as pages of a child's chapbook to those in 'Jerusalem Delivered!'"

"We will deliver France?" cried out Joseph.

"We will!"

"Yea," muttered the Capuchin, while he embraced the young aspirer to the Premiership, and, his cowl falling back in the act, he showed his leathery face, with prominent nose and gleaming, hollow eyes lighted by the sulphurous flame from the storm-clouds, "yes, you will *deliver* France—as Simon delivered you to me—helpless—to Rome!"

At last, violent storms sweep the skies of all vestige of their furrowing the azure field. But the ground was covered with tokens of the injuries wrought, and many a cottage thatch was being repaired in the early morning. It was lovely, and the tapping of the woodpecker in the devastated forest was echoed by that of the hammer in the chapel, where the decorators were fastening up the marquis's escutcheon, with the hatchments of those families bereaved by the same fatality.

The preparations for the funeral were not hurried. In those days of cumbersome vehicles and bad roads, time had to be accorded for the distantly situated, perhaps connections exceedingly touchy upon punctilio and questions of rights and standing.

Besides, there was the feast to be attended

to; involving sending to Paris for a major-domo who understood the latest court dishes for the delectation of the squires and their dames, and their surprise.

Through funeral and feast, Armand de Richelieu bore himself with a quiet dignity which, devoid of exuberant grief, testified that he knew how to behave as chief mourner. Bishop Alphonse had arrived, but, under the plea that he needed solitude to compose the sermon over his brother's remains, he closeted himself with his familiar spirit, the monk Joseph, and the young lord stood alone—not requiring a tutor any longer, said all observers.

It was remarked that, brief though his military experience had been, it had already given him a carriage so martial that it won to him all the ladies' hearts and the outspoken praise of those old relatives, ex-heroes of the Wars of the League.

But already the rumor was afloat, without any one being able to point to the originator, that, overpowered with sorrow at the loss of his brother, he meant to quit the path to glory and glide down the cloistered way by which his other brothers (for Louis had come, to be "clerk" to the Bishop for the nonce) had eclipsed themselves in the Church.

"Better stay in the world, if only to revenge his murdered brother!" said more than one greybeard, noted for a quick hand at a sharp rapier in youth.

"Wait!" said the more sagacious. "I wager that he will not gulp down all the vows in haste! That will enable him to wear and draw the sword on occasion, even like unto that little abbé in Paris who is making a name for himself, by displaying his flamberge, as you rare

old tilters used to style your swords, more often than his psalter."

"What is his name, and what name is he making?" asked the curious.

The provincial gentry were as eager for news from the capital at that day as at a later one.

"What is his devil of a name?—this abbé's?—ah, I have it—he is the shadow of the Bishop of Paris—and he is one Gondi."

The name found no greeting; the future Coadjutor of the Archbishop of Paris had not, by years, attained the apex of his notoriety, and none here divined how he would figure in the contests of the *Fronde*.

They could have divined the future of Richelieu sooner!

CHAPTER V.

THE POPULAR RESORT.

At the present day, whoever wishes to leave Paris, convinced that he has studied it conscientiously if not thoroughly, must give a prolonged glance, to say the least, to the Pont Neuf.

Now, thanks to the extension of the leading city, it is vulgarised. In the early decades of the 17th century, so much to the contrary of this aspect was its position, that it was the rendezvous of fashionable people, not merely in the broad day, but in the dark hours when the highest noblemen, having exhausted all legitimate pleasures, did not hesitate to "operate" as cloak-pullers and cutpurses, like the veriest thief.

In reality, its sides continued the promenade, always gratifying to the lounge, from the Bastille, one way, and the Conference Gate, on the other, over the River Seine.

The same stalls and booths for the sale of goods, as varied and exotic as the vendors, lined the thoroughfare.

Extraneous, too, were the lookers-on, of whom a goodly number, decidedly strangers and foreigners, were the purchasers of those articles even then considered Parisian and without a like in other cities. These visitors were identifiable as having but temporary dwellings by their eating the *oubliés* and simnels, as well as the legs of roast fowl (wrapped in green leaves, we admit) as they strolled on, gaping,

between mouthfuls, with new amazement.

The parapets of the river edge and the rails of the bridge were hardly to be discerned, so many persons leaned upon them to cast pebbles into the stream and count the rings on it so made, or to gaze, by the hour, at the most patient of beings, then, as hereafter, the Parisian fisherman.

The Port lay under their eyes; vessels from as far as the river mouth testified that the Parisians who had accompanied the army to the Siege of La Rochelle had not forgotten, in ten years, their maritime experiences.

Above, the sky was of dazzling blue; below, the ruddy tanned sails—or the grey ones of coarse canvas, among which some odd private flags and streamers floated, half-covered cargoes in course of discharge, to which, brought from the confines though they were, the hardened citizen had ceased to pay the tribute of an exclamation of surprise.

From these loads, over which capered seamen, athletic and agile as Gibraltar apes, exhaled odors of all sorts, from a blessed perfume to a stench of odd African or Asiatic drugs.

If a thousand causes of irritation assailed the nose of the rural visitor, as many for his hearing rose to fill the dusty air.

The miscellaneous music from an itinerant show; the bell of the parish town-crier; the beaten sticks of a vendor of summer drink, composed of saloop and molasses, the beverage antedating "coco," as the instruments of his appeal to the public did the xylophone; the bawling of clothes-dealers; the hissing of steam at the open-air cookshops; the laughter of country throats and children's; the innumerable vocal exuberance of a throng—all this

so dazed a young gentleman who had not yet shaken off the clay of the country highways, that—as a relief—he welcomed the sonorous blast of a military trumpet. It was blown to clear the way.

It was a recognised signal.

The officers and soldiers of the Royal Watch and of the City Watch, stopping short in chat with friends in the gathering, leaped to the center of the street, where the gutter ran, and began to beat and push back the throng with the hilts and the flats of their swords. They were reinforced by the soldiers idling, who, though off duty, answered to the call, as they had likewise recognized the trumpet blast as announcing an important comer.

This double cordon of all arms, displayed uniforms of all colors. Here, the “Lesser Old” Regiments, the Marines, Normandy, Auvergne, etc., appeared beside “the Old” ones, four in number, Navarre, Champagne, Picardy and Piedmont, the latter, perhaps, the most ancient, if truly derived from the infamous Black Bands.

“Way for the Household Troops! the *Maison du Roi!*” cried a thousand persons, overwhelming the appeal of the Watch.

In a twinkling, so pliable and collapsable is a popular gathering when a passage must be cleared to see a sight, a broad path was traced through the dense concourse.

Down this alley, formed of human beings, a second trumpet flourish resounded.

All eyes were turned towards St. Honoré Street.

“What is it, citizen?” inquired the young country gentleman, drawing breath after being

nearly choked by the cloud of dust raised by the scuffling of feet.

"The King's troops—escorting his Majesty, the Queen or one of 'the Royals'—by hasard, we are in the right road for them to return from seeing one of the forts or hunting-boxes!"

It was a veritable procession.

First, two sergeants of the Royal Watch, mounted on fair Norman horses, guarding two trumpeters in the royal colors, who blew in unison, and like Stentor replacing his organ with a brazen horn.

Then, a body of pikemen and one of musketeers, their horses led by grooms, carrying their extra supply of cartridges—for the pikemen being infantry, they were dismounted out of courtesy.

"It's the Normandy Regiment," said the citizen, overflowing with zeal to enlighten the bystanders, a trait of the Parisian—bless him! "That is an officer with the spontoon—that, a sergeant for, see! he carries a halberd! But they have not got a flag flying!"

The crowd sympathised with the speaker, puzzled too by the partially martial array, and the soldiers wearing a look not at all everyday in a military career.

"Whatever are they escorting—what guarding—in those wagons? look out! it may be ammunition! Powers of heaven! there is a whole train—if a *train* of gunpowder!" continued the citizen, unable to get away and making a joke to put a good face on his terror, "we shall be blown into the ditch which wants filling up, since they are demolishing the old Wall of Charles V. and it does not furnish enough material for the job!"

The shudder was communicated to the as-

semblage, but all were compacted, and the way of flight open was only over the rail into the river, so that they stood, quivering like aspens.

Then the escort, perceiving the terror and guessing the cause, whispered the truth to their quasi-comrades of the Watch, who, shaking with merriment, spoke aloud:

"Fools! it is the furniture of his Eminence the Cardinal-Minister! he is removing from his old house in Royal Place, since it is too far from the Louvre Palace, and he had need to be always at the hand of his Majesty—for the caballers and intriguers increase like the gnats on the Seine side!"

The crowd burst into that hearty laughter which always comes at the heels of a subdued panic.

"Richelieu may well come to live at the Royal Palace," shouted a strong voice in the mass of people worst compressed, "as he is the king over the King!"

This time, no laughter rose; it was too serious for a jest, and too true, perhaps, not to be an insult.

The silence was broken by pretty music of a mounted band.

It was a sweet diversion, when feelings were in tension, and joyously the populace shouted:

"The King's guards! they come—with light horsemen and the gendarmes!"

The riders surrounded wagons, each drawn by six or eight powerful Mecklenburg horses, covered with canvas and rope-bound so that one could only divine the goods so packed.

"It's the Cardinal's treasure!" was the cry.

"His treasure," replied a monk in grey, who stood upon a keg by the stall of a Dutchman, serving salt herring and a penny loaf to all

comers, in opposition to the flimsy patties of the native cook, "do you not know that the treasure of the Prime Minister is his library? in which he learns to make France great in war, as witness the Siege and Surrender of La Rochelle—in peace, as witness our home placidity—in finance, as witness the disgorgement of the leeches of the Treasury!"

"Our friend in grey is right!" retorted the same lusty voice which had made the unapplauded jest upon the fit residence, under the royal roof of the real ruler of the realm. "Well!" with a mock sigh, like that accompanying the fall of a pavior's rammer, "as long as I do not have to read his poems or hear his tragedies—let his library go!"

This time a few laughed, and the wit modestly withdrew as before.

Then the trumpets blared and all the train swept on, the dust becoming overpowering under the wheels and hoofs.

The country youth was astounded.

"So many soldiers to guard a statesman's furniture! how grand the Cardinal must be!"

At the end of the procession, drawn into the vortex by its hurried departure, the idlers followed closely. The citizen with whom the young man had exchanged a word or two, was carried away, amid the urchins cheering the Cardinal and the King.

But he was not without someone to speak to him.

"Od's my life!" said a voice roughly, "you had far better stand aside than post yourself as a block to be the monument of the Red Eminence, with your absurd panegyrics! 'Great?' great noodle, you! stand off and cease to gape at the flies!"

This was the voice of the twice-interrupter of the jollity of the idlers.

He was a splendid fellow, tall of figure, robustly filled out, and wearing not exactly a uniform so much as a composite attire, which looked as if he had been left for dead on a battlefield, stripped by the camp-followers and, found alive, substantially complimented on his bravery by his comrades of all arms contributing, each corps, towards his fresh equipment.

One learned in the tailoring for the army, might have laid his finger on the different articles making up this dazzling suit and said:

"This harlequin attire is not of the Swiss or the Italian mercenaries! it is a *macédoine*: This undercoat is of buff leather after the manner of those of Maurevert's *Carabins*; it is covered, to take off the cutthroat air, with a violet coat with yellow facings, like those of the Norman Regiment which you just saw pass. As for the hat, it is of grey felt, in the English style by the way it is pinned up from the brow; but the scarlet feathers pretend to claim a regular attachment to the royal household. In short, this is a jay tricked out with the war-hawk's feathers!"

Fortunately, perchance, for such a commentator, he did not say anything of the like.

In silence, therefore, after his outburst, the free-lance regarded the young man who, as if he was stupefied by the address, still barred his way.

He was not in the mode, that was clear. His black hat had a narrow rim, and but one black plume; it was in harmony with the unfashionable cloth of his doublet and small cloak of the same sombre hue. He wore gilt spurs and had a swordbelt without the weapon. Per-

haps, though he seemed rather melancholy than sanguine, he feared to venture among the crowd where a hasty word leads to a hasty blow, and a hasty blow to the Châtelet Prison. Even in the remotest province, rumor had carried the news that Paris was no longer at the mercy of the common ruffian by day and the noble ribalds by night.

What particularly curled the lip of the stalwart man in the picturesque array of military garbs, was the silent goat's beard, which, with a budding moustache, traced a triangle or rather three parts of a cross on the handsome face of the youth. His long hair was not so black but fell in brown curls, to square shoulders. His eyes were clear grey and full of assurance as they watched this bullying character.

"Death of my life!" roared the latter, sufficiently satisfied, it would appear, with his scrutiny, "it does not please me to turn in and out of this mob like a rustic 'threading the needle,' on the market green! as *you* say!"

The youth in black had not breathed a syllable.

"It does not please me, and I shall not twist and turn to please these gawky starers who encumber the good streets! Will you or will you not make way, in the name of the Master-Fiend?"

The passers-by stopped, collected in a ring, and their rows augmented like deposits of sand on the shore.

The young man had turned red, certainly, but he made more of himself, rather than shrank, by putting his arms akimbo most insolently, or in dignity, as you please, and he

continued to look the cavalier of heterogeneous costume in the eyes.

"Make room, do you hear? or have you come to town to be treated for hardness of hearing by one of those quacks over there by the theater of Master Gonin the juggler? or for hardness of comprehension by some doctor of the Sorbonne? Make room for me, I say!"

"When you are less impolite—perhaps!" replied the young gentleman, in a clear and firm voice.

"And who are you, pray, to ask a soldier of quality and officer—of fortune—to behave politely?"

"I am not a low-born braggadocio, at all events!"

A murmur of the lookers-on proved that, as ever, the wasp was being favored in his encounter with the bumble-bee.

"What is the title of our high-born gentleman, then?" sneered the other without taking up the epithet.

But he fingered his cutlass, a dragoon sword of the Ottoman pattern which might have been worn by a Sobieski.

"My name is Didier."

"Nothing at the tail of it, as even a cur, sometimes, has a tinpot?"

The other turned crimson and his lip bled from a nip of his fine teeth.

Some women crossed themselves and said—not "Poor boy!" but "Poor mother!" Men laughed and the officer of fortune roared with mirth.

"All foundlings are noblemen in Spain," said he, "but you will have to bring something stronger than mere assertion into our courts to prove your pedigree! But, I suppose, *you* sup-

pose that your *goatee* in the Cardinalistic mode will suffice to get you a post in his Eminence's service? No doubt you lifted your hat and you cheered as his bed, bedding and books went by, escorted! degradation of the army and the body guards, by my faith! by a whole regiment, if you summed up the number! a pretty escort to his books and unplayed tragedies! I begrudge him it all—albeit I should allow him the whole garrison of Paris if they took him to the Execution Place on the Strand! this Patriarch of the Atheists!”

The crowd drew back; his repeated insults to the Minister alarmed them, fearing that it was part of a plot to draw out confidence and warrant a wholesale arrest.

Several, who had accepted pamphlets, probably advertisements of new cookshops but possibly libels against the State Minister, surreptitiously slipped them from their pockets and dropped them over the parapet or at their feet.

“Stay, sir!” cried Didier, with a flaming face, clapping his hand to his side for the missing sword, “as long as you annoyed me, I regarded it little, for I am no quarreller, but as you insult the representative of the King, and the head of the State government, I—”

“You! you talk big because you dared not come to town until hearing that duelling is under an embargo! this comes from having a churchman to govern a kingdom! but learn, jackanapes, that the officers of the army crop the ears of all who puff up the fame of this bloated spider who sits in the web and pulls the threads by which he entraps all the good souls of France!”

The young man looked round on the faces. The good citizen who had stood by him caught

his glance, having returned at the scuffle and recognized the rural squire—to his delight—as we all like to see our own acquaintances in a snarl.

“Here,” said Didier, dextrously tossing him a coin, “hire me, of that honest dealer in old iron, a bit of a sword for half an hour, for that silver louis!”

On the edge of the passage-way, a second-hand metal seller displayed odds and ends, among which figured two or three old blades which perchance had armed the paladins of the Round Table or, less fantastically, the panoplied heroes of Pavia.

“I will get you the blade, my faith!” cried the citizen, “but allow me to pay for it out-and-out! it will be an honor for me to arm so gentle a cavalier!”

“Get him a toasting-fork!” sneered the officer of fortune. “Or have you not such a pole as they use in teaching bears to dance! I will lay aside my sabre for it and teach young *Did-dler* here to dance as elegantly as his patron did before the Queen, that day when he admired her—save his impudence! and did not want us to make war with her brother of Spain!”

“This passes all bounds,” said Didier, to whom was handed a rapier. It was somewhat rusty, but it would serve for the lethal stroke in capable hands; and by the way the young stranger handled it, it seemed to have arrived there.

At the same time, remarkable still more, since it went by several sets of fingers not particularly clean, the silver piece returned.

“Your money!” said the citizen, beaming with rapture at being a sort of subsidiary hero.

"Let them drink it to the victor's health!" said Didier, all the more loftily as it did not look as if he had many more in his black velvet purse, flat as a scapulary.

The crowd cheered, though—heaven knows! a silver louis of seventeen *sous* would go but a short way amid such a number.

The officer of fortune frowned. He had evidently entrapped himself and had the air of one abandoned by his supporters, but he was too far committed to retire.

"So you are armed to support your obsolete trumpeting of the Tyrant in Scarlet! Now, I'm called Malargue, the *Anspessade* of the Canton-of-Uri Spears! Duelling is my recreation, as warfare my standing dish! On guard, to defend your boor of a Cardinal! as the Court calls him!"

"Hold!" said the monk in grey, advancing, with the mob making way in less reverence than respect for sharp elbows industriously applied, and his rope girdle, used, as a flagellant might his scourge, to the dilatory boys.

All turned their attention to him, and murmured, thinking that his cloth would compel him to put an end to the dispute just as it was becoming worth witnessing.

"The weapons are unequal!" said he cavalierly, as though he had been all his life on the "field of honor" and not apparently in aisles and cloisters. "That scimeter and a Toledo rapier—fie! Is there not a gentleman within hearing who will lend this officer—of fortune—his blade?"

"I am not an officer, only a sub-officer," said a sergeant of the City Watch. "I am off duty and I will lend my sword."

He handed the weapon to Anspessade Ma-

largue with the familiarity existing between officers of fortune—that is, those who fought their way from the ranks—and the under-officers, for the officers by appointment were of the nobility and shunned the base-born.

The other brandished it as one used to all arms, and smiled.

“Are we never going to begin?” said he quickly. “After all, and despite an officer of the Watch assisting materially, the regulations forbid duelling—”

“It is not a duel to defend the rulers of the realm from aspersions,” interposed the belliscose grey monk, his voice sounding hollow in his hood. “Like this soldier, representing the civic armed hand, I speak for the Church Militant! let it go on!”

The crowd stared with wonderment. This was no ordinary combat.

The feeling of its importance spread. The dealers ceased to vociferate praise of their goods; the singers of ballads were hushed and lowered their *oriflammes*, composed of song-sheets on a cross-stick at the end of a pole; the vendors of miraculous cure-alls and pomatums for all purposes, “and others,” rested their lungs; the marionettes hung as if in *articulo mortis* at the ends of their wires; and not a thirsty or an admiring soul stood with open mouth at the spout of water from a street fountain at the bridge head.

Above all, the Tuscan bronze horse, not yet surmounted by the Henry IV. statue, was rapidly covered by sight-seers.

“Yes, yes, let the combat go on!” was the general cry.

The majority were for the younger and weaker man, which is a popular weakness; and

Didier lost little by espousing the unpopular side, for the Parisians detested Richelieu with almost the acrimony of the Court party.

"Wait another moment," interrupted a tall man who had leaped down from a play-actor's booth platform on seeing that the throng had eyes and ears solely for the duel in prospect and not for the glorious lines of Mairret and Garnier. He was attired in an Oriental costume, as the Orient was misunderstood at the period, almost as gorgeous as Anspessade Malargue's habit, but less lustrous with newness. On his head was one of those round caps, not unlike a turban, worn in the early days of Louis XIII. by old noblemen, but its preposterous ostrich feathers, of dubious white and in sad need of curling, drooped over a sharp face and hook nose; his complexion was made Moorish with a smear of Spanish brown. He wore a frayed satin doublet, but a *burnoose* over it instead of cloak. His loose full breeches were caught up into the tight round-top of postillion's boots, of which the funnel top had been sheared off, to give an Oriental air, no doubt.

He carried a sword-sash in which was stuck a horse-pistol and a straight sword, for want of a yataghan.

This motley character, with the assurance of one habituated to speak in public, continued:

"This combat requires seconds, and, behold! I am willing to figure by the side of the illustrious Captain Malargue, whom I knew at the Siege of Pampeluna!"

The keen-eyed saw him exchange a knowing wink with the anspessade. They were surely bottle-companions if not comrades of battle.

"I accept the second," said Malargue, probably not grieved at being reinforced.

Didier looked round. The grey monk certainly befriended him, but one could not expect a Capuchin to be second in a duel, although he had encouraged it.

"Will any one be my second?" inquired he.

We have stated that he had the general sympathy, but, after all, duelling was an infraction of the royal and civic police laws, and there was a wide difference between urging on combatants from over the hedge and stepping into the field to be remembered afterwards as next to the principals in the encounter. So a hush and quiet fell upon the tumultuous spectators.

"Will you have me, since you welcomed the Capuchin?" said a squeaking voice with sarcasm.

The citizens made way for an ungainly little man in the black dress of an abbé. The women crossed themselves and whispered: "The Abbé of Nôtre Dame! hail to M. de Gondi!"

Gondi had added to his gown, cap and rosary, a sword and its belt, the former holding its own with the Spanish rapier of Didier for length and savage aspect. He alleged that he had so much visiting to do at night in the rough and perilous district in which are situated St. Jacques of the Slaughterhouses, the Cathedral, its ill-famed purlieus, and the vale of the Palais Royal, that he was obliged to go armed. In the later times of the Fronde, his sword-bearing was alleged to have been not merely the outcome of a belligerent spirit, which the abbé possessed to overflowing, but proper to a drill-instructor who marshaled insurgents for hostile operations.

Didier had some sense, though young, for he

studied the face of the crowd at this offer; since no one laughed, he concluded that he might rely on this sword, though in the hand more accustomed to the holy-water sprinkler, and said cheerily:

"I accept the abbé!"

Certainly the priest must have commanded respect, for no one so much as smiled at the somewhat ridiculous confrontation of the principals and their seconds.

Didier, youthful, pitted against a veteran warsman; the Matamore, who pretended to have been a real soldier before he went upon the stage, against a little appendage of the Cathedral!

Meanwhile the lookers-on fell back to have a clear field for the combatants, so that on one side the bridge parapet was a barrier and on the three others the compact gazers.

They were to witness a pretty clashing of steel, after all.

CHAPTER VI

WANTED, A DEMON.

The Matamore, perhaps full of the traditional antagonism of Church and State, notified the other second that, in accordance with a usage going out of date, he was ready to entertain him at sword's point while the principals were engaged, and, nothing loth, the bellicose abbé drew his long sword.

Their collision did not last long as the little man, with infinite dexterity, warded off all thrusts and delivered a lunge which almost spitted the player. He had his "quantum," as his companion, the quacksalver of his show said, while two or three of the players carried him off the scene.

The priest wiped his rapier negligently and restored it to the sheath, glancing towards his principal.

Didier found that his Spanish blade was exquisitely balanced so that its weight and length did not embarrass him. His wrist was supple and strong and he bore the attacks of his antagonist with fortitude while awaiting an opportunity to disengage and thrust in turn. It was necessary for braggarts to understand the governance of the cold steel, and Malargue, for all his pretensions, was no exception to his crew of bullies of the bowling-alleys and tennis-courts. He continued the assailant, which always commands a tolerable amount of applause.

But, to his mischance, he was not wielding

his favorite weapon, handled like a broadsword or cutlass, and going out of fashion; this thrusting and pinking and parrying innumerable feints, exhausted his no great stock of patience and caution. Besides, the spectators, after the manner of the "gallery" at all contests, did not scruple in commenting audibly on his attire and bearing and he was chafed into essaying a lunge of some cunning and considerable force.

It was not only met with success, though the edge slashed Didier's doublet and changed the sable to brown with a gush of blood, but the young man, losing touch, darted in under the brawny arm so deadly a reply that it would have perforated the taller man had he not slipped to one side. Angered at the laugh from the crowd, taking it that he had evaded by intent and not by accident, he forgot what weapon he was using and attempted a swinging blow, with both hands on his sword. This blow, remembered on the duelling-grounds as "the Jarnac Stroke," from having been invented or notoriously employed by a Count of that name, was allowable with a two-handed sword or a cutting blade, but outlawed with the thrusting arm.

"Hamstrung!" cried he, too confident that he had succeeded to hold his outcry in triumph.

But quicker than he or Didier, a bystander had perceived the foul stroke and, snatching a staff from a countryman, come to sell greens at the neighboring markets, he interposed this stout oaken defence. It was cleft asunder, stout and tough though it was, but the very act had the effect of deadening the force and the young man, receiving the blade flatwise, was simply lamed by the shock.

Rapidly recovering, for Malargue was still smiling, he dropped his sword as too honorable for such an opponent, and, lowering his head, ran at the man. He thrust his head between his legs, lifted him on his neck and shoulders, after the trick seen in wrestling matches in the country fairs, and, running on, carried him till both reached the parapet. Here, he let it stop him; but, releasing his hold of Malargue, the anspessade was precipitated head first and backwards down into the river.

Didier rose and disdained to look behind him as he turned.

He stalked through the crowd, rushing to the bridge side to see the other's fate, and quietly returned the rapier to the dealer in second-hand iron, with thanks.

But little did he appreciate the true nobility of the petty Parisian tradesman. With a dignity not unbecoming even in that fusty, rusty, snub-nosed fellow, he said, loftily repulsing the rapier:

"It has been honored by sharing in the victory over a creature of bombast—it is too exalted to be intermingled again with these common shreds and scraps of iron! Pray you, young sir, keep it! Or, if you insist on paying—I will accept three silver louis more! Believe me, it is a true Spanish blade, forged at Segovia by the Brothers Manoel. Any Spaniard will approve of it, and will tell you that Master Ancilline Duprat of the Pont Neuf head-of-the-bridge sold it at less than value!"

While Didier, moved by this unexpected address, was concluding the purchase on these terms, the fickle spectators of the double duel entirely forgot this hero of one bout, giving entire attention to the unlucky Malargue.

The latter had been thrown over at the third abutment. The Seine was embanked at this period, but not as seen in our days. Wood confined the stream instead of the stonework, and mud came up to form a foreshore where it was not dredged away to permit the discharge from barges close to the waterside.

It was into middeep of mud, called "ooze" by the *mariners*, a playful epithet for the fresh-water sailors of the Seine, that the bully had fallen head-foremost.

Fortunately, the contact with the mire cooled him and while he floundered head uppermost, his sight and sense returned to him, though the mask of slime over his countenance and erstwhile handsome coat was thick.

He reflected that he had perhaps been pitched into the water as a direct interposition of his good angel.

"That monk in grey," said he quickly to himself, "bears an uncommonly strong resemblance in what I could perceive of his features and what I heard of his voice to the Grey Robe! The familiar of the Minister! whew!"

He spluttered the mud out of his mouth and muttered:

"Yes; he allowed—nay, approved, furthered the duel! and the springald was some fencing-master's pupil set on to give me a lesson! and only playing the rustic hobbledehoy! If I get out of this nasty pickle, I am well off!"

But fate was still no friend. The mass of starers, lining the parapet over which he was made to fly, stood five deep.

"There he is! playing the frog!"

A roar of laughter hailed this quip, for in the language of the vulgar, "to play the frog" was to drink to excess, which causes a man to jerk

his limbs like the batrachian, as well retaining its usual meaning—very applicable to this blunderer on this *terra infirma*.

At almost the next instant, a cry, not humorous, rose:

"The Watch! the Watch comes to arrest the duellists!"

It was the truth. Assured that his protégé was safe and the victor, as far as the bully and the matamore were concerned, the Capuchin had drawn his gown round him, shaken his cowl down over his brow, and glided away in the throng.

The abbé, reflecting on the consequences of his intervention, rapidly approached Didier, beside the high-minded iron-dealer, and whispered:

"Young man, the archers of the City Guard are coming. After all is said and done, there exist edicts against fighting with weapons in the precincts of the Cathedral and the Markets, which have their privileges, heaven be praised! Make away with you! By the way, the Abbé de Gondi of Nôtre Dame will not be sorry to see you once more! One of your parries was very pretty!"

"An old gentleman of Blois who taught me the small arms, was a pupil of the Florentine Morazzo."

"I compliment him on his art! Remember, the abbé is your friend, since he fought for you—and in these times it is good to have friends in any camp! A priest may be of assistance to a gentleman!"

"Particularly when he handles a sword so handsomely!"

"Thanks! But, away! the soldiers come!"

Didier was left alone by his disappearance.

The multitude were regarding Malargue, deviously staggering in the treacherous fluid toward shore.

At this juncture, the head of a squad of City Archers appeared from the corner of St. Eustache's.

"You are lost," said the hardware merchant, frightened. "Here is a fit sheath for your sword. For heaven's sake, shut it up! It will betray you as one of the duellists if kept naked! Take, sheathe, and flee into the Students' Ward!"

But while Didier still wavered, he saw the Watch stop. It seemed to him that the monk in grey barred their path and conferred with their sergeant. At all events, they faced partly round and headed to descend the long incline by which the waterside was reached.

A cry from the crowd informed Malargue of their new direction, if he could not guess.

"The Watch! Coming to take you! Fool, do not try to get on the shore! Leave the strand, idiot, and let them lift you out into that boat!"

The Watch marched down upon the strand, but, on arriving, saw a skiff crossing the river, with a dripping body across the thwarts.

"He is one of them—and drowned," said the sergeant, rubbing his nose, amid the jeers of the spectators over his head. "He has escaped!"

"What of it! All the less for the cage!" said a philosophical archer.

"Imbecile! Do you not know who the monk was that bade me neglect all else but arrest the reviler of the great Cardinal-Minister! That tavern-haunter Malargue, so-called Anspessade of the Uri Legion?"

"All monks are alike!"

"But he was a Capuchin!"

"Pray, in what does a Capuchin take precedence of other friars?"

"In the first place, comrade, learn that he is not a friar."

"But I have always heard of friars in orders grey?"

"The grey friars are the Franciscans—the servants of Saint Francis. Now this one is a Capuchin, the follower of Saint—Saint *Capuchel*!" explained the sergeant, inventing a new occupant for a niche in the Romish Walhalla, in his quandary.

"Oh, so this is the Monk Joseph?"

"It is a monk, comrade, who takes precedence of all the religious men, monks, friars, priests, throughout France, and I have seen him bowed to, in Avignon, two summers ago, as if he took precedence in all Christendom as well!"

The archer gaped at his superior whose garb had never taken this turn into ecclesiastical fields before. At all events he was enlightened by the speech, as Malargue had been by his own intuition: "His Grey Eminence," was Father Joseph Le-Clerc du Tremblay.

He whom we have seen secretary to Bishop Alphonse, and secretly steward to the Richelieu domain, had become the intimate agent of the Prime Minister of France, the Cardinal-Duke of Richelieu, for the petty bourg had been elevated into the dais for a peer. Only among the people was he a plain Capuchin friar; the court acknowledged that he bore high ecclesiastical rank; but if he were a bishop, where was his see? If higher still, what place was open for him when the high-

est church prelates assembled? A few, who were not reckoned short-sighted, went farther; they said that the Grey Robe hid a greater man in the eyes of Rome than the Red one: that Joseph was the prompter and Armand the puppet! That the time would come when the robes would be thrown off, and all would behold Richelieu displaced and Tremblay enthroned.

Meanwhile, the prudent and the jocular alike hailed Joseph as "his Grey Eminence!"

The archer was convinced; he muttered:

"The explanation is fine! But we must march back to the watch-house without a prisoner all the same!"

Didier, relieved from immediate alarm, lingered by the shrine, with a perpetual lamp, at the corner, listening to the chat of the spectators who sauntered home with the news.

"Malargue had escaped by a boat which picked him up in the teeth of the Watch, who returned to their quarters, silly with vexation. The abbé has gone to Nôtre Dame, where would be sanctuary if he had spitted on his rapier ten play-actors! The Matamore is wounded and has been taken to the Grand Hospital! *Palsanguiene!*" roared the citizen, excited by this budget for retailing to his wife, as he passed Didier and winked at him, as an acquaintance, "to think of an actor dying in the very House of Heaven!"

For so hospitals were styled in that day.

This worthy burgher gone, the young gentleman from Blois felt wholly lonely. The crowd which had witnessed his prowess was completely broken up and passed, like the bubbles on the muddy Seine, excited by Malargue's involuntary plunge.

"Such is fame! Fleeting as the bloom on a maiden's cheek!"

"Impudent fellow!" said a voice pertly at his elbow. "You let my cheek alone!"

He looked out of his reverie.

A girl of seventeen or eighteen, pretty in the Paris popular fashion, that is to say, saucy, piquant, and with diminutive features, like an old woman rejuvenated, was at his side.

She had emerged from a wine-shop of the Dauphine Place, but she had not been drinking. Her lips were fresh with the natural dew.

Her costume was a patchwork of colors, not unlike Malargue's in variety, as though she had retained a keepsake of wearing apparel from each of many mistresses in whose service she had not long stayed. White cap; primrose cross-over neckerchief; cherry-red petticoat and a darker red one beneath, with rose stockings and neat russet shoes, this was her attire. She might be the Singing Chambermaid of the illustrious Mondori's Theatre, of which the band was heard playing a popular air near by.

"I ask your pardon," said he, bowing as it were to a duchess. "I was speaking to myself. I was not seeing you, or anybody."

"Have you been here long, without seeing anybody?"

A visitor from the provinces might naturally be pardoned for surprise at this frankness on the briefest acquaintance. Didier did not reason on this head, so winning was the little woman, and thinking that an allusion to his duel was in the speech, he answered lightly:

"I have been on this spot upwards of an hour, and I was well placed, I assure you, to see everything!"

"Then tell me if you saw in the crowd—

sure, also, to have a front place—a sub-officer of the Swiss Mercenaries, anspessade, they call his rank, by the way—his name is Malargue—some call him Captain! He was in a brilliant uniform, more showy than the Guards' at the King's own door! Yellow as gold, red as blood—"

"Hem!" coughed Didier.

Indeed, he had seen "this Malagrue!"

The girl laughed at the mispronunciation.

"Malargue! It is well for you that he did not hear you misconstrue it!"

"I have no fear of his overhearing me, or seeing me chatting with his—his sister or sweetheart?"

"I am Louisette, at your orders, my gentleman—and while M. Malargue is something of my courtier, you understand, he is the employé of my mistress."

"Well, return to your mistress and suggest that she send to the tailor's for a change of clothes for her employé! Unless," he added, with mock gravity, "he only needs a wooden suit."

"What do you mean?"

"That 'Captain' Malargue fell over the bridge!"

"Fell over the bridge—into the river! For love of me? I confess we had tart words, but not to justify his leaping the Pont Neuf."

"Well, he did not fall of his own will. And as to the river, he fell into its mud!"

"His uniform is spoilt, then?"

"The gloss is perhaps a little off!"

"And he so detested water!"

"He was disputing with—with a citizen, about—what was it about? Oh, I remember now: About the color of the Cardinal's beard,

when his foot slipped, that deuce of a rail gave way—how do I know? In short, he was over the bridge, as though shot out of a mortar, in a twinkling!”

“Well, he would not have been fishing and pulled in by a gudgeon—he is more in the habit of pulling gudgeons out!”

Didier laughed with her. This was a revelation. A girl of wit who did not break her heart over a lost—perhaps drowned, gallant, but joined in the laugh at him. Besides, she evidently gauged her boastful devotee correctly. But it would be difficult to recount the matter without seeming to court praise for himself and he shrank from the bare supposition.

“Do you not believe he is drowned?”

“Not he!”

“Strange unconcern, in a fond little heart like this!”

“But he was born to be hanged—”

“I thought something of the kind, do you know?”

“Know, Master—”

“My name is Didier—”

“Know then, fair Master Didier, that my mistress prophesies that he will meet a violent death—not drowning—”

“By the rope!”

“She says that a rope will have a hand in it!”

“Ah! I believe your mistress is a truthful prophetess!”

“To be sure, since it is the celebrated Floretia!”

It was remarkable with what pride the girl spoke of the celebrity. No man may be a hero to his valet, but the chambermaid of a

Parisian celebrity swears by her mistress through thick and thin.

Didier shook his head.

"Then, you are infallibly from the country?"

"I did not say the contrary!"

"But everything, after all, about you, does say so! Your hat, doublet, the way you sling that old-fashioned long sword, your boots! they have spurs, but, on my salvation! you have walked into town by the barriers!"

"As for the sword, it is a recent acquisition, to replace one I was robbed of at an inn. I plead guilty to the rusticity of my apparel. You need not be a witch, like your celebrated mistress, to divine I have the scent of the sweet hay and the bee-plant and not of the civet cat, like your city gallants, Ma'm'selle Louissette! And your mistress is—"

"A fortune-teller, a soothsayer, in the full acceptance of the name! The idol of the mystery-loving cit.'s, the intrigue-loving courtiers, of all who wish to know on whom someone will smile to-morrow: the King, Cardinal, Ministers, the sun itself—for everybody who goes to bed does not wake in the morning!"

"I daresay we are all mortal!" said the young man with the recklessness of his age.

"All except my mistress, who talks to everybody as if she were born in the year One!"

"My life on it, I should like my fortune told—or, even, my past enlightened!"

"Young sir, you shall have an audience, or never trust in my management. And believe me it is no slight favor, for I have been offered ten gold pieces by a patron for me to cheat another out of his turn!"

"I do not know that my fortune is worth

crossing the palm with gold," said the other, dubiously.

"Oh, it shall cost you nothing—but doing me a little kindness!"

"Who would not be kind to you, Louissette!"

"Malargue, if he were to come here at this moment!"

"Don't look timorously for him! He will not appear! What should he appear for?"

"To do his task."

"So you said before! Am I to take his duty on me?"

"You are bright! Yes! Listen—all trades have their secrets! In order to terrify the unbelievers who mock at our *pare—pare*—you are learned—you might help me out! Mock at our *pare*—"

"Paregoric—pare—oh, do you mean paraphernalia?"

"Exactly; for the reception room is fitted up without a thought of expense—real crocodile from Egypt, costly drugs that burn in censers with curious flames, making one ruddy as a poppy and then ghastly green as a corpse! Ugh!"

"I think I understand! Sometimes your ordinary paraphernalia—"

"Extraordinary, please!"

"That was the difficulty with your predecessor the Pythoness of Apollo, who used to have smoke surround her, and colored fire! So my tutor informed me, on good authority, I doubt not, that she engaged a burly peasant to carry a redhot trident—that is, a large fork, built after the pattern of that with which this knave, frying sausages, hooks them out for his customers. He carried it to good purpose, to-wit: pitching out of doors those who would

not be persuaded of the supernatural power underlying her acts and sayings."

The girl lost most of this speech, as she was studying the double stream of passers, a little proud of being seen conversing with a handsome young cavalier, and a little fearful lest the redoubtable Captain Malargue burst upon her view.

"So you seek one who will personate Pluto and prod the disbeliever?" concluded Didier, merrily.

"Do you say our device is old?"

"Ancient as the water that runs and the grass that grows!"

"Time hallows all things," she caught it up smartly; "so that you will make no difficulty about obliging me, spite of your air of nicety, and language to boot!"

"Two thousand years has hallowed the trick—I may play the *dæmon*, without doubt; at least with no more compunction than abbés show who take up the sword," said the youth from Blois, recalling his clerical second from three of his fraternity passing, with sidelong glances—which, however, comprised Mademoiselle Louissette.

"How good of you!" and she smiled sweetly. "It is understood, then? If any gentleman—who proves no gentleman! refuses to pay for talisman, horoscope, charm, fortune, advice in love or court affairs, *et ceteræ*—we call on you—"

"Be the name Belial, Abdiel—"

"We say, Beelzebub!"

"You don't stand upon trifles! That is the chief of the band, otherwise, Satan!"

"We call and you come!"

"After a long and laborious, horrifying incantation?"

"On the contrary, at once! Because—"

"The ladies ought to be obliged?"

"Because Mistress has a louis in readiness at each apparition!"

"You may flatter yourself: it is not every house in Paris that has a familiar spirit on hire!"

Louissette looked toward the bridge.

"See how they hang over the rail! Perhaps they have fished up the true demon!"

"Don't tremble! It is a fisher, indeed, but he has caught—an old shoe! But let us leave for fear that his next cast may be more profitable! For an hour I am your man, pretty Louissette!"

"Ah, you will have the thanks of my mistress, with the gold!"

"The dear old lady!"

"What! Old!"

"Certainly old, yellow and wrinkled, as you are young, fair and smooth as a peach!"

Louissette trotted by the side of Didier, guiding him with a nudge of the elbow through the lane of stalls into the New Street of the Lower Fields. The show of goods changed character, from miscellaneous, becoming of the garden stuff variety. It was an efflux from the Main Market.

"All witches are alike, as I describe them."

"Well, I admit that in truth my mistress is aged, but not so to the general eye! Now, you invite confidence, Master Didier, unlike these bumptious Parisians who pretend that they already know everything, at which they slur and banter; and they are not discreet and circumspect, as I will engage you are!"

"I thank you!"

"My mistress," proceeded the tiring-woman in a whisper which indicated misgiving and awe, "covers her old, yellow and wrinkled features with a false face—"

"A false face?"

"Oh, but it is a splendid *face-similate*—"

"A fac-simile, perhaps—"

"As you please, for, I thank heaven! I make no pretensions to learning! This false face is of Modena make, silk waxed, moulded and colored delicately so that it would puzzle a hawk-eyed spy of the Cardinal to say it was a mask."

"If you do not meddle with learning," commented Didier, "you do not seem to refrain from politics. What would a guileless child like our Louise know of the Cardinal's spies, prithee?"

"Where is there not a spy? Besides, we have calls made on us, but with the best of intentions, look you! by the head of all those spies—"

"Their head, eh! Oh, his Grey Eminence?" cried Didier, in order to show that he was not uninformed on town gossip.

"His grey fiddlesticks, young sir! What is Father Joseph, dreaded though he be, to his Eminence's Deathsman—"

"Lord! Have you the Executioner of Paris your guest, too?"

"Not the actual headsman, understand me! But him they call the Cardinal's Executioner, namely, the Chevalier Laffemas—"

"Indeed!" said the young countryman, little enlightened. "I should think that his fortune were made, and wanted no telling!"

"He comes, master, to assure the mistress that as long as she carries on her profession

in so lady-like and genteel a fashion, she need fear nothing from the police."

"Very kind in a man with so grim an office!"

"He is very kind! in words—deuce of a livre does he ever throw away on me, showing him the door, though!"

"I suppose he does not know anything about the lady-like and genteel manner in which your demon puts out the recalcitrant!" said Didier merrily.

"Of course not, or he would not recommend her to his acquaintances as surpassing in lore and insight into the future the famous Syllabus of Como—"

"The Sybil of Cumæ, I suppose? I bow to your mythological lore! Go on, faster! This opens like a drama!"

"It will end like a tragedy, malapert, if you attempt to make love to her instead of to the maid!"

"You are so dangerous when jealous?"

"Not I! But she is courted by a high nobleman!"

"Some count?"

"Pooh!"

"Not a marquis?"

"Pah!"

"Stop! A Sybil! Nothing under a duke, at least?"

"Eh?"

"Kings keep astrologers—why not a duke court a pythoness?"

"How do you know it is a duke?"

"Because his Grace of Sourdis, for example, stands in the direst need of a soothsayer in petticoats! Only such a one can tell him which of many gallants will run away with his daughter before he puts her in the convent!"

"You are not a rustic!" exclaimed Louissette, stepping aside, "to know these things!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Didier, forced out of a habitual melancholy by his gay companion; "I heard something of the sort on the road: two workmen at an inn spoke of having fitted up a room rather than a cell at Our Lady of Divine Succor, and, being pressed by a scurrilous enemy of the Church, they explained that it was not a nest of luxury for an abbess, but an apartment for a noble boarder. Then, some one said that the Duke of Sourdis' groom had lately ridden often on the highway between nunnery and town, and I put the facts together!"

"You can set up for a wizard, after a few lessons in our house! But, hurry!"

"No, let me hear the bells!"

"It is St. Germain's, and Roch, and the whole *kyriel*—drat them! It is two o'clock and my mistress will be devoured with impatience! Her throng of admirers and consulting clients will be at our doors now!"

CHAPTER VII.

FACE TO FACE.

The maid and the enlisted youth turned into a court which was not a thoroughfare ordinarily for the all-sufficient reason that it was without an outlet. This "Blind-alley of the White-chapel," Blanchapelle, was finally blotted out by its old houses collapsing, in the period of Mercier, who described the house we are to enter, before its last stage of decrepitude.

After the narrow gorge, it suddenly widened so that carriages, once within, could turn and extricate themselves, but with difficulty.

It was crowded with vehicles of all kinds, no more or less than gathered beneath the windows of the dining-room at Versailles when his Majesty was doing the court the honor to let them see the King eat. This was rare, for Louis XIII. was eccentric: as his Jester Langelly said:

"My royal master does nothing like common people! He likes to eat alone and have a throng round when he plays *solitaire*!"

Where there was an interstice between large wheels with projecting hubs, litters and chairs were lodged, and in the chinks these grudgingly presented, ladies and their serving-men and maids were wedged, fainting, gasping, screaming as the horses plucked at their head-dresses, vociferating, and moaning. All were trying to insinuate their bodies nearer a doorway under a curiously carved oaken porch.

It was, hereditarily, the abode of a necro-

mancer, for here dwelt Flamel before he had quarters in Nôtre Dame outbuildings, and Floretia may have found his Inextinguishable Fire still aglow in the furnace where he made potable gold.

"Never mind the mob!" said Louissette, to whom the tumult was a daily sight. "I will get you in by another entrance, for we took the adjoining house, or at least the part not used by a Turkey merchant, so as to have a private way in."

"But these are great folk!" said Didier, astounded at the dames of quality elbowed and elbowing women of lesser degree for precedence.

"To be sure!" said the maid proudly. "That dark gentleman is the Duke of Guiche, showing the ribbon and order of the Fleece, which he was promised by my mistress! He comes to thank her for the verification of her prophecy! That is the Chancellor D'Aligre—President of the Council, I warrant—for Madame said that he would rise! But look at the young men— All their chins smooth as the back of my hand! Hist! What do they say? The King has set the example—to remove the chin-tuft, so as to distinguish the Royalists from the Cardinalists! Young sir, you are out of the court fashion! But come, come! The doors are opened!"

She drew him, abashed at such a brilliant gathering in this sordid court, into a doorway next that where the head of the glistening and variegated hydra hurried in.

To play the demon, and throw noblemen out of doors! He well might retract his pledge to assist the distressed abigail.

"Oh, they are nearly all ladies," said Loui-

sette, perceiving his awe. "You will not have to frighten, but to charm!"

"Eh?"

She closed the door on them, and they stood in a passage, dimly lighted by what rays could pierce a cobwebbed blown-glass pane over the door.

"Men want to ask question of Old Harry! Women, only to see something agreeable! So we shall have recourse this time to our Well of Truth."

"What, have you all the concomitants of fable? The Well of Truth—no less?"

"My mistress invented the name! It appears that Truth lives in a well, without getting diluted! I should never have thought that. However, our well is a long tube, at one end of which the patron peeps in, and at the other—"

"Her adorer! Nothing more simple! But how do you always get the chosen one to be on hand thus to meet his idol face to face?"

"Silly fellow! If it happen so, well and good! If not, not! And my demon becomes an angel for the nonce! My mistress knows all the tittle-tattle and it goes hard but, with a little stock of wigs, mustaches, 'royals' or chin-beards, my demon does not pass during an instant for the beloved one!"

"This is all innocent enough," said Didier, breathing more freely. "And amusing!"

In the hall they heard the church bells chiming the quarter.

A hole had been made in the two walls and they passed into Signora Floretia's residence. They were on the basement floor, presumably beneath that of the fashionable witch's reception-rooms.

The two could hear the thunder of feet tramping up the stairway, the ladies wearing pattens, since the court was so muddy from the unexampled number of callers.

Didier was in a room from which the furniture had been removed, if once it had been inhabited. An odor of foreign spices, camphor and musk used to preserve silk and furs, supported Louisette's story of the Turkey merchant. On a table was laid out an assortment of specimens of the hairdresser's art, looking like an actor's dressing-table. A lamp, which Louisette lit, illuminated this table and a small cheval-glass with elaborate Florentine gesso-work, but a shade cast the rays away from a pipe which came down into the room and terminated six feet from the floor. Its upper end pierced the ceiling.

"The truthful well," explained the maid. "All you have to do, dear, obliging Master Didier, is to listen. If you hear the phrase: 'Look into the Well and you will behold your intended mate!' why, thrust your face into that funnel! Smile—yes, you may smile! It becomes you, for you are given to glum looks, if let alone! But make no other grimace, mind! Take care not to sneeze! We lost a clever demon by his letting himself be overcome by an inhalation of Thieves' Vinegar with which the Dowager Duchess of Montresor inundates herself; and of which some drops fell into the well on her poking her head in the tube! We should have been ruined, that time, but for the old lady saying 'Bless you!' which my mistress declared offended the demon, put out the lights and caused her power to be useless for the rest of the day!"

"My pretty Louisette! Depend on my chok-

ing sooner than committing myself as an impolite demon! A kiss, and adieu!"

Louissette extricated herself from his hands with not overmuch fleetness and disappeared up steps at a corner.

Didier laughed to himself.

"Paris for adventures!" muttered he, sitting on the table, for he had been a long while on his legs since breakfast and fought a duel on them, besides. "I have not been thirty hours here before I am surrounded by the grandees of court and city! That is a pretty damsel and she goes straight to the point in her engagement of her mistress's peculiar servitors! A demon! save the mark! What would my tutor say—who was a disrobed priest, I believe! But, if I am to be imprisoned here for an hour, let me see what provisions are made for the captivity. The red nose of Signor Malargue—beg pardon. Malargue—warrants my foresight—that he never endured an hour without recreation. My own nose misleads me if I have not proceeded straight to the larder of the Satanic haunt!"

Indeed, in a niche under the stairs, a hutch had merely to have its slide drawn to reveal a respectable pasty, a rounded earthen-ware vessel of red wine and a loaf of bread, with a hole in the center to be hung on the arm of the eater, so that it should be in reach during the repast.

"I flurried the girl by taking the kiss," said Didier, unceremoniously pushing the wigs in a heap at one end of the table under the lamp and placing the comestibles in their stead. "Otherwise, she could not have failed to tell me of this solid consolation for her absence."

The situation was romantic; the events of

the day had been exciting, but Didier was at an age when appetite could not be stilled by a page of the "Astrée," that fashionable romance of the day; he began to eat with a relish which converted the basement into a cave of cannibals.

Suddenly, in the midst of a draught of tolerable wine, he stopped and nearly choked.

He heard voices above, coming down the pipe as if from a sounding-board.

"Oho!" said he, "this is pre-arranged—it is necessary that the demon should hear all that the patrons say so as to paint his face according to the humor of the peerer into the Well."

Two voices were in dialogue. Feminine; one cracked and whining, like a very old woman's, the other—words fail to describe the music with which its well-enunciated syllables fell on Didier's ear, nay, on his soul!

"It is a seraph!" he murmured.

The aged voice said, with simulated irritation:

"Madame, you are trying to deceive me, the sorceress, to whom nothing occult is secret—from whom nothing can be hid! You are not a fine lady, not even a *bourgeoise*! You are not a woman of twenty, spite of your air which bears up that assertion, but you were born in 1601, at Chalons—which sufficiently disproves your attempt to pass as an Englishwoman. Your father was not noble, not even a member of the Black Robe! But just a county-court official, a sort of usher who used to serve the citations of his superiors in riding about the country. I will say this for him: he had a gentle spirit, and, often, instead of carrying out his orders rigorously, misread them. Moreover, he would open his purse to the peasants

oppressed by the law! He was a good soul, and, *Marie!* you have no reason to be ashamed of him! Now, if I have convinced you that I do not deceive and that I can pierce the mask of deceit, what do you want of me?"

"I want to know if I am ever to be happy?"

"She is unhappy, this angel," thought Didier. "Like me!"

"Happy? All you seek, now, is happiness, eh? Well, you were born under Venus and—and—Minerva—"

"This magician makes no bones of it!" thought the listener. "Since when was Minerva one of the planets?"

"You can be happy, yes."

"Lucky woman!" thought Didier, interested so that he pushed away the flagon.

"But you must—"

He strained all his faculties, but the long speech and any remarks in reply were inaudible; the two had evidently moved out of the focus of the Well-mouth.

"Heavens! Is she going away? And am I never to know who it is, beyond the trite name 'Marie?' " moaned Didier.

But at the next instant, he heard the witch anew:

"It is the only way to happiness!"

"Then, with whom am I to be happy?"

Didier held his breath at this momentous question. Stranger though he was to the questioner, she could hardly be more interested, if one might judge by the whiteness of his lips and the intensity of the strain while awaiting.

The fortune-teller of the Cul-de-sac Blanchapelle paused, as her tribe will do, to give more effect to her reply.

"Ask Truth and you will be informed."

"How can I appeal to Truth?"

The woman was impatient.

"This is the Well of Truth!" A wooden rod, probably the soothsayer's inevitable wand, rapped on the summit of the tube at the other end of which fretted Didier, and the voice continued: "Look in; and, if the Fates are propitious, you will see the lifelike presentment of him with whom you are destined to mate and lead a felicitous life!"

"Oh, the likeness!" with disappointment.

"The *simulacrum*! I can do no more!"

Didier hung back, his modesty drawing him. No doubt the dupe was peering in, for he heard a sigh of vexation.

"Nothing!" sighed she.

"Look!" repeated the witch, imperiously.

Didier seemed a statue, against his will, for curiosity, if no worthier sentiment, moved him to advance his head into the orifice. He tried to stir, but in vain. He was a Tantalus, blinded!

"I tell you, there is nothing but a blank!" repeated the woman whom the predictress had said, was christened "Marie."

"Look!" repeated the other, with assurance.

At the same moment, a brazen bullet, let down on a fine silver wire through a minute aperture in the ceiling, swung with great dexterity against the half-filled lamp globe and a sound, muffled, it is true, but like a gong, roused Didier from his unaccountable stupor.

He understood that it was his cue—that the demon, or angel, must appear.

His dismay vanished as rapidly as it came. He turned his attractive head of the adolescent, full of grace, and with the smile which

Louissette had counselled, into the funnel of the pipe.

He caught a glimpse of a most beautiful countenance as his reward—all the more entrancing as it was devoid of extraneous embellishment—the face and no more!

The black eyes gleamed, the brown ringlets shook and seemed to exhale ambrosia, the lips parted in a delight and amaze, or perhaps in horror at this black business, and then—all vanished! The same deft hand which had sounded the signal on the lamp as a bell, pulled a second wire which crossed the pipe midway with a valve-like disc. To him below as to her above was darkness—an impermeable separation.

“What a lovely visage!” sighed Didier, passing his hand over his eyes, as though they were dazzled by a ray of unclouded sun.

A soft hand pressed his lips and prevented the outcry being as loud as otherwise it must have risen.

Louissette was by his side.

“Well done!” said she, “but talk in a whisper!”

“Talk! This is no time—I am in no mood to talk!” responded he, testily, shaking off the hand rudely. “Let me go! Show me the way, and pocket that louis, with this other for your pains! Let me out of this den! I must know who that lady is!”

“Have a care! Our patrons are not to be followed with impunity!”

“Lead me, or I will break out through the very wall at haphazard!”

So changed was the quiet youth, that the transformation had as alarming an effect in Louissette as in her lover Malargue. Fright-

ened, she pointed to the door by which they had entered, and gasped:

"That is the way! But do come back! Oh, oh, what are we to do for a demon?"

She buried her face in her scrap of an ornamental apron, and she was sobbing as he bounded from her.

The court was not so crammed as when he came. Some of the visitors had departed, convinced that they were without a chance that day; the carriages and litters of those who had seats in the ante-room were removed to give the horses a walk round the gardens of the Palais Royal; and most of the idlers, having enumerated the titles of the persons of quality who frequented Signora Floretia's Dordona, had gone their way.

What was worse, two or three carriages, chairs and litters were departing in different directions, almost at the same minute.

In spite of the woman having been declared to be plebeian by the soothsayer, Didier entertained so exalted an idea of the position which the possessor of so much charm must attain, that he singled out a splendid glass coach, heavy with carvings, richly gilt, lumbering off, at the tails, be-ribboned and tied-up, of two immense Flanders horses.

Luckily, the pavement was execrable and the work of demolition of the ancient City wall filling the road with stones, progress was slow to so large a vehicle.

Didier, by means of his ardor and briskness, soon overtook it. It was the more conspicuous as its gildings were foiled by the sombre pile of the Châtelet Prison, at the end of Ferraille Quay.

On attaining his fugitive goal, he was more

at a loss than ever, for to run up to the window and peep in at the occupants, was to incur the suspicion of being a cloak-snatcher or even an assassin, for it might contain a court functionary, after all was considered.

While speeding, for he hesitated only mentally, a running footman, to whom the coachman, annoyed by this persistent pursuer, had communicated his doubts, turned and came behind the coach. He was armed with a malacca cane, tipped with a crest, thickly gilded. It was not only of value for leaping gutters and so guarding his magnificent clothes, but as a protection against thieves.

He was over six feet in height—a giant to the pursuer, on whom he looked with contempt as he stopped him by placing his cane, like a spear in the hands of a gatewarder, cross-wise before him.

“How now?” cried he, “are we to lose our lapdogs and coachwrappers in broad day?”

“The name of your mistress? and there is five pistoles for you!” stammered Didier, gasping for breath, and not sorry, physically, for the enforced halt.

The speaker was soberly garbed, we know, and nothing but his sword proclaimed his pretensions to gentility. To tell the truth, this required furbishing, and he was smothered in dust.

But it was a day of good and of bad luck—like our life, a harlequin’s arrangement! The *coursur* took pity on a fine young man, victim of some hallucination, probably; besides, five pistoles would regale his comrades of the cane and the whip.

He smiled benignly and answered:

“My mistress? It is the Châtelaine of Brich-

anteau. If you were read in heraldry, my student, you would see that by the silver counters on my canehead."

"Oh, the châtelaine—not married?"

"Not—ha, ha! At her third husband! She is, by the latest, Madame de Tiffaunges, and her husband is the Vice-President of the Parliament!"

"Still, she is fair, about thirty, but looking far younger, and wears her golden brown hair in curls?"

Through his merriment the footman replied:

"The pistoles, please! Thank you! In our profession, no pay, no say! That is a Spanish one with a hole bored—but never mind! My mistress will never see sixty again! Her eyes are—one green, one brown, for they are not mates! By the same token there is a ballad which runs the street, entitled: 'Two Odd Eyes!' but, I see, ballads to another occasion! As for hair, faith! She is wearing her black headdress this time—but she comes out in all the shades of brown and black, to suit her costumes!"

"One question more, for pity!" said Didier. "She has a younger lady with her?"

"In the coach?"

"Yes, who went into the fortune-teller's, La Floretia's, while your lady sat in the coach without?"

"My friend, men in saner senses than you have been clapped into the Samaritaine Hospital! The only companion of my lady, in or out of coaches, is her almoner, the good Abbé Taisant. It was he whom we set down in that confounded Cul-de-sac, where we had scant room to turn, for him to give a purse to a family in poverty, in the cellar under the cobbler's

stall. The cobbler is doing no business since the blind-alley is encumbered with great folk by reason of the devil's own—your fortune-teller! And he had to press his tenants for rent. Ah, go to a better world, my young friend! This is a sad one for poor folk! Adieu! I and my comrades will drink your health!"

Refreshed by his rest, the long-legged footman opened his limbs out like those of compasses, and in an incredibly short time was at the foot of the hill toward St. Sulpice's.

Didier retraced his steps, crestfallen. No one would have recognised the victor over Malarque or even the jaunty youth who had chatted so lightly with Louise.

In a few hours he had passed out of the stage of the lyrical youth and now was in the passionate one. He loved the wearer of that countenance seen, detached from all else, in the mouth of the Well of Truth.

"Marie!" said he, disconsolately. "The world is dark until I have the brightness of your eyes before me, again!"

In the neighborhood of the fortune-teller's, no one could inform him on that special visitor. It had been a great day for the witch and to single out one caller was impossible. As for Louise, he was convinced that he had treated her too cavalierly to have her still friendly. Nevertheless, as it was the only straw, he lingered at the head of the no-thoroughfare to see her again.

Alas! at dark she came out, to purchase the supply for supper no doubt, for priestesses of Apollo must eat—and on days of lavish gains, sumptuously, too. But she was not alone. Carrying her basket, and having one of her

hands tucked under his arm, was the truculent Anspessade Malargue.

Didier recognised him, although his change of dress was not as brilliant as that he had spoiled.

It was clear that he had invented a tale to do away with the bad impression left by his failure to keep his tryst, and that Louisette, not wanting to be questioned closely on the owner of the head seen at the bottom of the Well of Truth by the mysterious "Marie," was eager to substitute a feast instead of the pasty and wine attacked by her demon of an hour.

To be sure, there was the resource of asking the soothsayer, pointblank, the quality of her visitor; but the young gentleman from Blois had learnt a good deal from his brief sojourn in Paris. He wisely reined himself in from conferring rudely with a woman who evidently was a reservoir of the secrets of the capital and who could find, without her witchcraft, one of those sheets of paper, garnished with the royal seal and signature, and countersigned "Richelieu," vulgarly called "*lettres de cachet*," or in plain words, "blank warrants of arrest." Such a document would suffice to make Didier, who had exhausted his funds, and was wondering where he should pass the night, acquainted with the accommodation of the Châtelet, whose gloomy shadow had made him shudder while he was questioning the running footman.

"Home!" said he, abruptly. "If it is heaven's will, we shall meet again! I am not the man to starve in his Majesty's prison! Better die under his flag, charging the foe!"

CHAPTER VIII.

FUGITIVES.

The days were shortening and the shadows lengthening, as a man who had ridden on post-horses from Paris in high haste, alighted at Chambord, and spite of the fading daylight, and instead of taking the refreshment offered by the landlord of the posthouse, walked briskly into the Woods.

"That gentleman will be stripped of his fine feathers," said the host sulkily, at being balked of legitimate prey. "What the mischief does a court gallant, fresh as from his dressing-chamber, want with woodmen's paths amid the briars and thorns?"

He looked curiously after the stranger until the latter was lost to view under the noble trees.

He was right to criticise this odd proceeding.

The traveller was clad in the extreme of the mode, under a horseman's cloak, donned hurriedly for the posting. He was a man under twenty-five, who wore the luxurious habiliments with the ease of custom. His doublet was of Genoa brocade-on-brocade, that is, a super-weaving of gold thread over velvet, worthy of a queen's drawing-room. An over-body-coat of maroon velvet guarded the superb garment, but was open in the front and slashed on the full sleeves to show the stuff, as well as lace wrists and a collar upon which the nuns of Belgium

must have toiled for months. His ample breeches were buttoned with gold studs, each a miracle of chiselling, and the sides were fringed with gold; they dropped by their own weight into funnel boots of scented morocco, stamped with gold in Old Spanish devices. His spurs were of the same precious metal and from the hand of some noted smith. His large felt hat was trimmed with lace and adorned with four or five costly plumes, two sticking upright in defiance of the evening breeze and the others artfully curled and dropping around over the supple rim.

His eyes and his features, powdered and ruddy with cosmetic, notwithstanding his dusty ride, betrayed vanity, frivolity and fickleness; but, on the other hand, his sword, with a finely cut-steel hilt, hung at the Cordovan leather baldric with that inimitable availability for instant use which would have caused a footpad—probably, haunting the forest—to think twice before attacking this gay butterfly.

If he would be surprised at seeing him here, so would the associates of this magnificent beau—the Marquis of Saverny, “the dainty Nazaire,” whom the chroniclers cite as a perfect fop.

Although it was hard walking in riding boots in a woodland path, where the unearthed roots jutted out, and stones were washed up by the October showers, he made very good way and emerged into the open, with a sigh of relief, where he saw the River Loire gleam under a growing mist and the spires and towers of Blois rise from its bank.

He let down the tops of his boots, which had defended him from the brambles, and brushing off the dust with an improvised wisp of

hazel twigs, prepared to enter the town by the bridge.

But, for once, he showed more prudence than might be expected in a coxcomb. To save the expense of a tollhouse at each end of the bridge, the ingenious city officials had established a central house where the bridge guards and the turnpike collector could harbor themselves in wet weather.

The marquis no sooner reached this small and smoky hole than he showed to the soldiers and the collector a very bright specimen of the coinage of the realm, and said in a winsome voice, which few creditors had ever resisted—and it is known how obdurate they are!

“My friends, here is the wherewithal to quaff a stoop of wine at my expense. I am the Chevalier of Avannes, whose valet was thrown from his horse on the river road and so I am forced to enter the city and my lodgings alone. Allow me to shake the dust off my clothes before I cross the bridge-sill!”

“Enter, my cavalier!” said the collector. “I may trust your lordship not to dip into my till—ha, ha! more particularly as the usher of the Court of Accounts has just called, as is his wont, at dusk, to transport all the takings to the Hall of the States of Blois.”

Saverny stepped within the box with alacrity.

At almost the same moment, a man on horseback rode over the bridge. He was dressed in black under a brown cloak, which had a sanguinary hue in the dying sunlight, reflected from the rolling river.

From habit he darted a searching glance at the soldiers and the collector to whom he flung a coin for his passage. He could not see the

marquis, who had shrunk into the darkest corner, muttering:

"My good star has saved me! It is Laffemas! It is the Cardinal's inquisitor! Already they are after me for that pestilent little lampoon! Oh to be an author—only once, and then to be chased like a hare for the lines!"

But recovering from his alarm, and reasoning that an excellent way to baffle a pursuer is to follow him, keeping him in sight, turning as he turns and stopping when he stops so that a marked interval separates the twain, Saverny, having adjusted his dress to be less out of keeping with the requirements of a town, sallied forth, bowed to by the soldiers. They were the more respectful as he had folded up his cloak and hung it over his left arm, and his strikingly bright apparel was visible in the twilight.

It was not difficult to chase the man in black whom he called Laffemas.

This man left his horse at the Crowned Pig Inn, in Cross Street, and took the devious way into Old Street with an easy tread.

It was not astonishing that the marquis, as a courtier, should so readily recognise Norbert Laffemas, almost as well known, for an agent of Cardinal Richelieu, as Father Joseph himself.

The two latter had carried police-craft to a high stage of excellence, above that where Mouchi, Francis I.'s Inquisitor-general had left it.

To lead this band of spies, emissaries and secret messengers the Minister had chosen, to some surprise, a humble clerk in the Court of Requests, Laffemas, reputed son of a valet of the preceding King.

This man, though said to be a born Parisian, had the sunburnt tint and awkward ways of a peasant from the south. His nose was long, yet hooked and pointed; his eyes were bright but cunningly avoided having their glance caught, and wandered, in conversation, like an erratic meteor. He usually wore the black garb of clerks and ecclesiastics.

He was cleanshaven, as if he had heard of the royal advice as to removal of the "goatee" or chin-tuft which Louis had favored until he noticed that it grew more flourishingly on the chin of his Minister than on his own. So the "royale" had become "cardinale," and was thenceforth prohibited.

Laffemas was no sooner appointed Master of the Court of Requests than the terrible babble of the court stated the "true" grounds for his promotion. "He is a kinsman of the Cardinal; his nephew or Bishop Alphonse's; why not his unclaimed son?" But in vain did they seek for a point of resemblance in the suppositious father and son; Laffemas remained vulgar, not at all showing a trait of identity with the son of Captain François Duplessis, renowned in the Wars of the League.

If, at times, Richelieu showered favors on this dubious connection, at others he treated him roughly and as if despising him.

But, on the whole, Laffemas had more smiles than rebuffs and, since a mystery at court is like a mystery elsewhere, that is, enjoying some attention, Laffemas profited, and had made himself dreaded.

To be dreaded at court is more valuable than to be loved, since poor human nature's love is more ephemeral than its hate or spite.

In the meantime, the marquis stalked the police chief as he might a buck.

But, severally, Laffemas passed the mayor's, the chief of the local Parliament's residence, the guardhouses, the watch-houses, the little-castle or prison.

"I am sure he is not going to arrest me, even granting that he followed me down here, so close at my heels. I am no Roland, but even a Laffemas would not dare single-handed to try to arrest me. How do I know but, like many another rogue—for he is rogue, a Duplessis or a Laffemas! he is running with the hare and holding with the hounds—I mean, he comes to Blois under pretext of inviting me to appear before Presiding Judge d'Argenson at the Chamber of Justice in the Arsenal for my petty verses on the royal barber-ism! But really to make a call on some lady-friend! But, Laffemas, in love!" added the noble, thoughtfully. "That would be news for my circle, if ever I dare enter within the city bounds again!"

As he was sighing, he saw his object stop. He had barely time to throw himself into a deep doorway.

Laffemas buried himself in the like.

"He is expected! It is a meeting!" muttered the marquis. "I am on the track of a cabal! Who would deny that I may catch Master Laffemas tripping, so that he will make *requests* to me for pardon, lest I ruin him with his master?"

Eager to check his pursuer, as he believed him, the noble forgot his dignity and approached the doorway with a cautious step not to be bettered by a professed thief.

Night came fast. He stood beside the pro-

jecting porch, hewn out of thick oak, black with raindrip and dust, his gay attire dimmed by the gloom in the street, where the houses, built with each story overhanging, made noon often as dark as eve, and eve was always as midnight.

A lamp swung to a rope across the street, it is true, but as the Almanack of Strasburg, on which the lamplighter relied, promised bright moonlight, the worthy Prometheus of Blois had taken his supper and was going to rest without a twinge of conscience.

"I was right," muttered Saverny. "It was an appointment. He has knocked in a peculiar way and the door is opened. A woman—ha! 'tis the Old Woman of convention, the duenna, who identifies him—she will lead him indoors and I shall lose my man!"

As he rattled his spurs in his stamp of badly concealed vexation, he still heard the two voices—an old woman's squeaking and hoarse by turns, and Laffemas', jovial but relapsing into a sharp grating tone which revealed insincerity and temper easily exasperated.

Saverny lost not a sentence of their dialogue.

"I cannot let you in," said the woman; "and yet, God wot! I did long to sit at the board with you and see you dipping your nose in the wine from my own little vintage on Coigneux Hill! But my mistress has returned and she is going to stay in, I am sure."

"Well, and have you discovered, dear mother?" said Laffemas, wheedlingly, "who your mistress really is? Your account of her uncommon good looks—"

"Beauty, son!"

"Mother—and son!" echoed Saverny, glueing his ear to the other side of the plank. "Have

I penetrated the secret of his origin? Woe to thee, Master Laffemas, if you have the warrant for my arrest in your pouch! I will make you swallow it and ram it home with this discovery! This hag never mated with so proud a being as our Minister, or I will die on the gibbet for my mistake!"

"Her stock of jewels, in the secret drawer of her chest, her skill in music, her witty words—who is she, mother?"

"My dear boy, I have obeyed your instructions and, whenever she went out, which was seldom enough for a proper ferreting in her room—I examined everything, ripped up secret pockets, pried cunningly devised drawers—"

"Be quick!"

"Oh, we have no passers here; it is a turnagain lane and all citizens go up Old Street. Well, I found out all about her. Her name is Marie Chalons, only in part. She is Marion Delorme—"

"The court beauty, who has disappeared from all eyes for the last three weeks? Who was thought to be in London, or Madrid, furthering the plots of the Queen or of the King's brother, Prince Gaston? Mother, you are a dotard!"

"This lovely woman is Marion Delorme," repeated the old woman deliberately. "No sooner had I the clue than I went out and bought some chapbooks of the pedlar at the permanent fair on the North Quay. Well, there was her portrait in two or three—not works of art as in the Bishop's palace where I was charwoman, you know—but sufficient to hang a man upon!"

"Marion, here?" said Laffemas in a wonder

as great as that the other listener was thrilled by. "But, certainly, she had to be somewhere!"

"What are you muttering?" croaked the hag, ill-humoredly; "do you doubt me? what I have seen? It is true, I had but a glimpse of the creature, in Paris, when I was playing the fortune-teller, for your ends, I suspect, if also a trifle to my purse-filling! She came with a veil, but I did see her! not a face to be forgot! I tell you again, pictures in the penny-books to the contrary, if you gainsay them! this is Marion Delorme!"

"I do not doubt you, mother," wheedlingly said the Cardinal's Executioner. Then, in a lower tone, so that Saverny with difficulty overheard, "I warrant ye that she is here, in the shadow, all to carry out a plot! it may make us! She has never committed herself for King or Cardinal, but I suspect she is not for us! If this be Marion, she could not keep out of the whiff of the court winds! Does she have callers—many? of what nature?"

"Only one."

"Ah! that is judicious! man or woman?"

"A young man—"

"Noble, or merely a messenger?"

"He carries himself nobly enough; but is grave beyond his years, taciturn—I cannot draw a word but the salute of the day from him!"

"Is he ever in livery—what are the colors, the badge?"

"Oh, he is his own master! he wears sombre attire—"

"More precautions!"

"But carries a sword as one born to wear it!"

"Of course, if the project is great, the intermediary would be a gentleman at the least,"

commented Laffemas. "Do you see much of him—what is he like, close to?"

"At first, I let him in; then, mistress sent me to bed, and undid the door for him with her own hand. But, lately, she has become suspicious of me—poor old, decrepit woman that I am! and she facilitates his scaling her balcony."

Laffemas and Saverny looked up. They could see that a heavy iron-work window-guard projected under a window, after the manner of Spanish ones, and a Romeo would have little difficulty, if his Juliet lowered the end of a scarf, in climbing up into the room overhead.

"Are you sure it is a man?" said Laffemas, lowering his eyes. "These *intriguanes!* the Duchess de Chevreuse, for example, has cheated her own hall-porter in masculine disguise!"

"It is a man," replied the woman.

"But, after all, may it not be a lover? a beauty like Marion is capable of falling into downright love, one of these days, after having shocked the Seine into running red with her fickleness!"

"Lover? hoity-toity! what a singular lover! I have listened; and upon my faith! he seems to preach to her!"

"A Huguenot? or can it be the English agent, Montague?" muttered the agent of Richelieu, reflecting.

"And when they sing together—"

"They sing together?" exclaimed the other; "come, this is not like conspiracy, unless it be a blind!"

"They whine psalms, I believe, rather than what I knew as love songs in my days!"

"We will see what tune he sings in *the cage!*"

said the man whom she styled "son," emphasising the words and chuckling.

"Arrest her, and her visitor?"

"Oh, arrest Marion? that is another matter! but I can take a midnight escalader of a peaceful balcony! Then we shall know who he is, and secure any papers he may bear to her or from her. Marion has a literary turn! I should not wonder—remember this! but she wrote the quip about the King ordering all his Household to remove their chinbeards, because the Cardinal—great and generous patron!—has a finer one!"

"What quip?"

"Oh, verses with which half the town rings, and the other half laughs over! They begin: 'The tidings surely you have heard, how woe's befallen chin and beard—' "

"My satire!" murmured Saverny, thrilling with an author's joy.

"What time does he call?"

"Midnight! without fear of the marauders!" said the old woman, crossing herself.

"And stays—"

"How do I know how long? I cannot keep such hours. I tell the truth—I wanted to overhear and acquaint you with what they said, but they speak low, and I fell asleep on the landing! Then, I gave it up, still to confess to you, my boy! and I go to my regular sleep."

"Poor mother! unless you have made a great slip! But it matters not! I will get a patrol of the archers and, at twelve, we will capture our Cid as he clambers into Donna Mariana's chamber window!"

"But I shall lose a liberal mistress!"

"I will make up for all that. Know, mother dear, that I am promoted: I am Master of the

Requests Court, and I aim still higher. Why should I not, with a sire like to mine?"

The old woman coughed. She has been holding the door ajar during this dialogue and the night air began to affect her.

"As you please, Jean—"

"Jean! hang me with your 'Jeans!' bear in mind, that I am Norbert! a Jean, at court—save the mark!"

"Jean or Norbert, bear you in mind that I have always my own little cottage on the hill, which I bought with the money I brought back from Calcutta. And, faith! I am tired of waiting on the fine lady, who pretends to be reconciled to this quiet town, but yet wants all the luxuries of a palace! As for the young gentleman, what is his value to me? since I see him no more, farewell to any fee for opening the door and letting him out! Ah, it was a mean man who invented windows so large that folks can use them and evade the portress! Take him, my dear Chief 'Clap-the-shoulder!'"

"I will do it, at midnight, grandam!"

Saverny heard him kiss the old woman on the forehead filially, and he laughed to himself.

"It's his dam! an old fox! I don't need to see her to identify her in the day! he is the copy of her or I am badly misled by the similarity of their unpleasant voices."

He crouched down, drew his cloak over his gay clothes, and waited for Laffemas to be off.

The latter let the door close behind him, and, muffling himself in his cloak, for the dews were falling, he stepped to the sill of the porch.

"I have found Marion," muttered he, "for whom all Paris was looking! It is a fresh cabal and all the more decisive as they have induced Marion, a pattern of neutrality, to join them!"

Who is this go-between in dark clothes? Chalais' ghost? Baradas! or the King's jester, Langely, who delights in changing his parti-colored suit for dun or sable, and poking his sharp nose into all conspiracies? Well, we shall know in four or five hours! I will arrest this gallant! I can easily excuse myself, if I blunder, to say nothing of Papa Richelieu being ever-lenient to this unlegitimatised child! I will declare that he wrote "The tidings surely you have heard!"

"The villain!" muttered Saverny, trembling with rage; "another will be punished for my lines! he will go down to posterity as the author! and no one will know that the Savernys had a genius in the family!"

In his excitement he moved and his sword-hilt rapped against the stone where he cowered.

Laffemas, who had taken a few steps upon the street, stopped, half-slipping on the round stones. But if he saw the form shrouded in the cloak, he perhaps recalled what his mother had said about no citizens using this lane-without-a-head, and, afraid it was a robber, he set his face towards Old Street and rapidly retired.

The marquis came out of his ambush.

"What a find!" said he. "Marion, here! buried in Blois to keep appointments with a lover, or to play the boy who poises on the seesaw between the one who goes up and the other who goes down! who is the gallant? Cerest is in Venice! Pons does not know where she is, or he would not dangle round her house in the Place Royale; as for that hotblood, Nesmond, who is the springald to climb balconies, by reason of his Andalusian strain, he is enamored of La Neveu! Death of my life! I

am as eager as our friend Laffemas to know who so allures the reigning Circe as to cause her to quit us incontinently and dwell in obscurity!"

Mechanically, he was following again in the footsteps of the cardinalistic Inquisitor, when a sudden thought struck him, so lightning-like that he was transfixed to the spot.

"What an imbecile this terror of the lampooners has made me!" he ejaculated. "Why should I wander in this town for a refuge, when my old friend Marion does not expect her cavalier until midnight? I am supplied with the arranged-for rapping which summons her lovely handmaid to the door and I doubt not that Marion will be delighted to welcome a brother in exile! Besides, I bear the latest news, such as would hardly reach Blois the Benighted under a month. Here goes! at the worst, I can only be thrust out of the window! and a window into which a man can step from the street cannot much disable one who leaps from it!"

He entered the porch, outside which he had played the eavesdropper, and knocked in the same manner as Laffemas had done.

As he conjectured, the unfaithful guardian of the house believed that the late visitor had returned to correct his instructions or for some purpose which she judged to be important. She opened the door with an alacrity which electrified her aged nerves, and as she carried a lamp this time, Saverny saw who confronted him.

It was a little old woman with the same saddle-colored tint of Laffemas, his long, hooked and pointed nose, the same piercing eyes which

flitted from being fastened by another's glance—in short, the likeness was manifest.

"Good evening, Mother Laffemas!" cried Saverny, stepping within and planting one funnel boot so far ahead that it was impossible to close the door, which she instantly showed a desire to do on seeing it was a stranger.

"Mother What? my name is Rose!" she snappishly replied.

"Rose, be it, sweet one! I am of the court, courtly, you understand and I used the name uttered merely as a passport to your good graces. I am a dear friend of our dear boy Jean Norbert Laffemas, newly appointed Master of the Court of Requests, and, like him, I am a rabid Cardinalist! I see, like my master, nor black nor white, but red—Cardinal Red, you understand!"

This impassioned address did not seem to unbend the wrinkled visage, and he changed his key.

"I am a friend, also, of the lady upstairs, and, as a proof, I tender you to ten pistoles, which see! to usher me into her presence."

Dame Rose, as she preferred to be called, looked hard into the speaker's blue eyes, and on his blonde face, but the first were so insipid and the second so spiritless that she considered that this was a harmless guest. His knowledge of her relation to her previous caller still rankled in her, for she sulkily said:

"I suppose you may go up, the pistoles being honest money of which mistress need not hear a word—"

Saverny passed the coin over to her crisped hand, which closed on the instant with avidity, showing that she was vulnerable to greed. Then, with the other hand, lifting up the light,

she indicated that he might ascend the dingy stairs uncoiling before them at the end of a murky corridor.

The marquis bowed ironically and took the direction.

On the landing, spite of his recklessness, he paused. But through a keyhole streamed not only a pencil of light but a streak of rich perfume.

"Marion, to a certainty!" he exclaimed, and, emboldened, he rapped on the heavy door. "'Tis her Essence of Gulistan, forsooth!"

He had, this time by accident, hit upon another signal prearranged, for a quick, light step was immediately heard upon the rough wooden floor, with intermittent subdued scuffling where a mat or rug was in the path; a hand seized the handle impatiently, and the door opened.

The marquis, as he had done at the street door, stepped in to the aperture.

The inmate recoiled.

"Marion! it is our fairest of Marions!" ejaculated the noble, clapping his hands in joy.

"The marquis! Saverny! Nazaire!"

This outcry of surprise came from the cherry lips most admired in all Paris, the Rendezvous of the Lovely, and, consequently, Marion Delorme, whose other features were as adorable, might consider herself as an European cynosure.

Saverny, although a regular frequenter of her reception-room, could not refrain from the compliment of gazing on her, almost spell-bound, as compensation for the dearth of not having seen her recently.

CHAPTER IX.

A NEBULOUS LOVER.

Marion was born in 1601, as Dame Rose, otherwise the fortune-teller of the Blanchapelle Blind-alley, had divined, not a little, probably, upon the information supplied by her precious relative, Laffemas. But it was kept as a great secret.

But she was one of those women blessed with perennial youth. Like Ninon, or the Fair Gabrielle, she could defy time. In what was called a *negligé*, but which house-dress was the result of much art, deeply studied, she looked no less near twenty here than at the Cave of Apollo in the Cul-de-sac Blanchapelle.

Brightness and clearness of eye, black but looking dark blue; freshness of complexion, although it owed something to the cares of the toilet, no doubt; sprightliness of attitudes and suppleness of carriage, vivacity unspeakable, the delight of the wits and poets, for it was the age of Colletet, Boisrobert, Chapelain and others more brilliant in drawing-rooms than on paper; above all, winsomeness; Marion was a favorite of the Cyprian Goddess, without denial.

She retreated to an easy chair and leant one faultless arm upon it, as she stared at the intruder, muttering, by way of silent retort to his outspoken admiration:

"Inopportune blockhead! who would have dreamt this noodle would discover me?"

"Why, how now? Are we not still friends, fair Marion?" said the fop, advancing closely and opening his arms as if she ought to bound into them with gladness.

"Let us be friends, as ever, but at a distance," replied she, biting her lip till it assumed a deep carnation.

"Do we not embrace at this joyous meeting?"

"Not on my part!"

She sat in the chair like a queen, and took up a piece of embroidery with the golden bodkin to work on it, as if she had already dismissed him.

"A poor little wee tiny kiss!" persisted the worshiper.

"My lord!" cried Marion, in so angry a voice that, not having heard the like before, he stopped, rivetted to the floor.

"What cruel caprice has seized you?" stammered he.

Afraid that the reception would incline him to quit, he threw down his mantle on a settee by the door, like a viking casting off the rope of his galley; and looked beseechingly at the indignant beauty.

As the look utterly failed to moderate the wrathful aspect, he sighed so heavily that his lace collar fluttered, and said in a piteous voice:

"I think you ought to tell your humble worshiper what we are to think of your abrupt flitting out of town?"

She tossed her head and took up a stitch she had dropped with a vicious prod of the bodkin.

"How am I to explain to our set that, after seeking you in the Place Royale, I find you, accidentally, at Blois?"

"Oh, it is accidental, is it?" said she, breathing more easily.

"Partly so! I might as well seek you here as elsewhere. Hidden! bless us and save us all from Creditors—still, you had only to say the word, if you were annoyed, to have us make up a purse! Or set our footmen on to thrash the duns! But what have you done with yourself, these months, in this dreary hole?"

"On the contrary, Blois is blithe and merry, enough for me!"

"But what have you been doing? no park, no drives, no society, for Prince Gaston is in town, and nobody is at Chambord, for I passed through the forest and there was not so much as a poacher!"

"My lord, I have been doing what I like to do, and I like to do what I please. I am a free woman!"

"You, yea! but how about us, poor souls, who have not a soul to call our own—since you enslaved us! Look at your adorers—"

"I came here not to see them!" with a contemptuous curl of the lip.

"Morally, look at them! I will show you the panorama as the witch of the Blanchapelle Lane does on a screen of smoke—"

Marion started at the mention, and honored the importunate speaker with a look, not kindly, but he was gratified by the notice.

"There is Prince Gaston, to begin with!" said he in a less daunted tone. "He has quarrelled with all his favorites and is in an abominable humor! Abbé Gondi, forgetting his vows, goes down into the squares and serves as second to any chance-comers who wrangle over the wine-cup and fight out their dispute on the muddy pavement! Pressigny has let his wig get out of

curl and shaved off his moustaches before the King set that new fashion! The two Causades—”

“Are they afflicted, too?”

“Both! what would they be our two Dromios for, if not to be downcast alike at your inexplicable absence? When I return, with the news of your whereabouts, do not be surprised at a deputation from the families of all of those mourning and inconsolable swains to implore you to come back and make those fellows gay and endurable again!”

Marion smiled slightly.

“How does Beauvillain bear it?”

“Oh, he is courting every pretty face—but he always detested you!”

“Dolt! he is the only one who really cared for me! Is the old President of the Town Parliament—what is his name?—still sighing?”

“Leloup? He has been superseded; he moaned and sighed on the bench! he wrote ‘Marion’ for his signature on acts! ha, ha! He tendered his resignation, I believe, that he might organise an expedition in search of you, as more daring voyagers do for the Golden Indies! Meanwhile, he consoles himself by going to see your portrait, daily, that Philippe of Champagne has in his studio.”

“He has been making love to my portrait instead of to me, these two years,” said Marion, mirthfully.

It was clear that she bore Saverny malice no longer for having disturbed her in her retirement.

“All considered, she has a good heart,” thought the marquis.

“He had better burn you in effigy!” said he,

"for you are Unkindness itself to flee from so many good friends and lovers!"

She lowered her eyes, half-closed them, and it was in a serious tone that she replied, nodding agreement:

"It is precisely the possession of so many friends that caused my flight. Do I have a moment to myself, with all your calls? can I entertain a grave thought while your sparkling conversation coruscates around me? I regret that your brilliant parts in the end have filled me with regret! So I hasten into—seclusion—"

"Hem!" said Saverny, looking round. "I should prefer a convent!"

The room was vast and, consequently, cheerless. The furniture had been handsome in a preceding reign, no doubt, but now was fusty and not without a suspicion of moths. The curtains over the single large window were badly mended and through the rips glinted the vague starlight.

"Yes, I ought to be in a convent! there I might expiate the faults of my career!"

"Faults!" protested the marquis, sitting on a chair and stretching his legs with all the rapture of a man who had walked through the woods, while being unused to walks except in parks and promenades.

"Where do you lay your finger on faults, in your conduct, whatever they may say who do not know your life, like you and I do? You keep an open house in Paris, where gentlemen can meet who are debarred from other ground! If I, for example, call on Madame de Combalet, the cry arises, because she is Cardinal Richelieu's niece, forsooth! that I am selling my soul to his Scarlet Eminence! If I look in at *La*

Neveu's, it is worse than calling on *the Niscol* for they swear that I have gone over to Prince Gaston, body and boots! I ask pardon, by the way, for appearing in riding boots here, but needs must when Old Nick drives!"

The lady was not listening to his apology.

"You are right," said she, "I were better in a convent!"

"I wager that you would go into no convent unless the Abbé Gondi were the visiting priest! Out on you, to try to deceive me! I am sure that a love affair is at the bottom of this vanishment!"

Marion blushed.

"Never since there was a church were such resplendent eyes hidden under the black veil! Impossible! Black eyes and black veil! an occultation out of the calendar! On the other hand, to fall in love, in the county town! To conclude so fine a romance with such a prosaic epilogue! fie!"

"Nothing of the kind?" objected she, faintly,

"Will you lay a wager on it?"

She crossed the room to the door, without answering, and opening it a little she raised her voice to call:

"Rose, how goes the time?"

The old woman was heard snarling:

"Those lazy gentlefolks! can they not wait for the great clock of the castle to tell them the hour?"

The marquis pulled an egg-shaped timepiece out of a pocket but mournfully said:

"I forgot to wind up my watch! I have been so distracted—by your disappearance, on my word!"

"It will soon be twelve, midnight!" replied

the old woman, as if she were consulting the stars.

Marion looked alarmed.

Saverny rose, and whistled a hunting-tune.

"That is courteous; but between us, frankness! you might as well say that my company is not wanted."

"I shall be frank! You see that I am living most retired. I receive nobody in Blois, and everybody is ignorant of my dwelling."

"I credit that!"

"Besides," continued she, as if recalling a previous idea, "I dread your going home at a late hour; for, in this lonesome ward, the street-robber may be lurking! More than once, I have been awakened by shouts, clash of arms, appeals for mercy and brutal oaths!" She shuddered.

"I do not care. Set it down that I shall be robbed," said Saverny coolly.

"Ah, but sometimes a dead body is found—the victim too strenuously resisted!"

"As I should! well, then, I should be murdered. Why should I care to live, banished from you, Marion the Inimitable!"

"But—"

"You are divine, and I obey you! but, before I say farewell, I should like to know who is the favored swain who shuts us all out in the chilly blast!"

"Nonsense!"

"But I will keep your answer secret! You believe us courtiers featherbrains, slander-loving, loose-tongued, compromising and all that! but though we are always chattering, we never let out the main points! If you will not confide in me, Harpocrates' son that I am! Why?" he sat down again, as if to make a night of it.

"The obstinate fellow!" muttered Marion. "He will not go, or worse, he will hang round the door and so pick a quarrel with—with whoever comes; and, then! oh," she added aloud, as if she had only been thinking of the form of her reply:

"My dear Nazaire, it is not of the slightest consequence: I do love somebody, and I am expecting him every minute!"

"That's the way to speak with me!" cried Saverny, rising, agog with excitement and at being the confidant of the celebrity. "Can I escort you? you see how obliging I am! Where are you to meet?"

"At midnight, go out?"

"Pooh, at Blois!" said the noble with serene scorn.

"He comes to see me here."

"And soon, did you intimate?"

"On the stroke!"

She went up to the double folding window and opened both portions. The night was calm; the wind had subsided. The starlight fell pleasantly upon the Castle's high turrets, flashed from the enamel on the great clock; traced the ornamentation on the high portals under which paced the dignitaries of the Local Parliament, and showed the steep streets, deserted, leading down to the town bridge and the mills along the riverside. All was peaceful and the mist was warm as in late summer.

"I think I hear him coming! No; but he cannot be long!"

Saverny sighed portentously. "Spite of the night-hawks?"

"He would not let a legion of robbers detain him!"

"An eagle?"

"Are you satisfied?"

"Not altogether!" said he, balancing himself on one foot, and holding the other from taking the step.

She clasped her hands and, with them joined, pushed him towards the door.

"Do go, that is a good fellow!" she appealed.

"What, you send me packing and I am not to know the happy mortal who displaces me?"

"What will that teach you! He is known to me under the name of Didier, as he knows me as plain Marie."

The other burst out in laughter.

"If this be true," said he, "Segrais or Racan should have located Arcadia here, and made Blois one great lamb-fold! What does the wolf do? bribe the dragon, Rose, or climb in at that conveniently opened window?"

"He may not like to face the lovely Rose—he may enter by the window, luckily, as you go out by the proper way! go quickly!"

She stamped her foot, whether he observed her vexation or not.

At the gesture of impatience, Saverny ceased to laugh. Nobody could speak more seriously than he, in the inquiry:

"Friend Marion, do you know if he be a good gentleman?"

"I know nothing of his family-tree!"

"Well, I am no spoil-sport! you need not call Rose to me. Oh, talking of roses," said he, turning at the door, where she had seen him arrive with gratification, "I was forgetting!"

He took a book out of his pocket and forced Marion to accept it.

"*'The Garland of Love,'*" she read, stamped in gold on the side.

"Exactly. It is the talk of the town—that,

and the success of a tragedy called 'the Cid,' a Spanish piece which traverses traditions of the stage as its hero did the Moor!"

Mechanically fumbling with the leaves, a slip of paper fell out.

"You are forgetting—an order on the Treasurer, or a book-marker—" said she lightly as he stooped to pick it up.

"Gad's my life!" exclaimed he. "It is my death-warrant!"

Instantly she snatched it from his trembling fingers, which seemed taking up an asp.

"Give it me!"

"It is only a piece of rhyme!" said she, vexed.

"Ah, but what rhyme! Lord o' Mercy!"

"Comic! oh," and mirthfully she read, while Saverny turned red and pale in turns and still shifted his weight from one to the other foot:

"The tidings surely you have heard
How woe's befallen chin and beard?

Who would have thought

They could have brought

A long goatee on guileless chin

Up as a scarlet, *Cardinal* sin?

"Alack! you'll never more adorn!
You must from me be ruthless torn,

In Louis' name!

(Thirteenth of fame!

The number sinister who'd scorn?)

All of us must be cleanly shorn!"

What is the meaning of this doggerel?" said she, holding the broadside off at armslength, but so that he could not regain it.

"Let me have it! they are pursuing the au-

thor! The King is again enraged with the Cardinal and he set the example by shaving his pages, to do away with the chintuft, which he himself wore, but which had become the distinguishing emblem of the Richelieu party."

"Well, is that all? it is funny, and the rhyme is passable. Who wrote it? Bautru or Serisay?"

"I—I, Marion, out of my own head! which is likely to suffer for it!"

"Why are you so frightened! a paltry pasquin like that!"

"Oh, but the lawyers read so unlike us! D'Argenson, lately appointed head judge of a chamber of justice, says that allusion to the Thirteenth being unlucky is direct libel on the King!"

"How silly!"

"And then the little jest about the Cardinal sin—that sets his Eminence on edge to shut me up in Rueil Castle!"

The ancient stronghold of Rueil (*Rioilus*), was becoming a splendid abode, through the taste of Architect Lemercier and the artist Vouet, but though its magnificence should make it superior to any royal habitation existing, lugubrious stories circulated, particularly after the trial of the Marshal Marillac. In popular belief, which many courtiers shared or affected to share, the sumptuous pleasure-house of the Prime Minister—his Hampton Court as far as he was a Wolsey—hid traps, sliding panels, dreadful dungeons, under its Flemish tapestries, and among the statues glided a mysterious executioner, the active hand of Judge Laffemas, or of his colleague Laubardemont. The latter boasted that, in all cases of crime, a culprit could be discovered.

The marquis was one of the courtiers who believed what was sinister amid the gaiety, for he shuddered as he mentioned the name.

"Impaled on either prong of the fork! my poor Saverny! but there go the chimes! it is midnight! Be off!" said she with a change of tone. "If you hesitate, I will call the watch and give you up as the author of this atrocious libel on his Majesty and his Eminence!"

"You would not do that, Marion." said Saverny frantically.

"I would! Begone! Rose!" she called as she followed him out on the landing. "Show out this gentleman!"

Saverny stumbled down the creaking stairs, muttering:

"Marion has fallen in love with a boor! she is declining in manners! to threaten a gentleman with the police! Alas! if Laffemas should have collected his squad of alguazils! I hear steps without!"

The great clock was striking and the church bells followed its bells at a respectful interval as Saverny stood once again in the lane.

CHAPTER X.

THE TIMELY INTERRUPTION.

Marion hastily ran into her room and closed the door, securing it with an inner bolt. She was trembling lest Didier should arrive, as she had truthfully told her unexpected visitor.

She went to the window, as soon as she had recovered from her mingled feelings.

"I trust they will not meet!" she said.

Either Saverny had been shown out with the utmost expedition or Dame Rose had prudently retained him indoors until the coast should be clear; for the looker-out saw no one in the obscure court. In the mouth, where the street passed, there flitted a shadow or two. But she did not recognise the forms, and supposed them the watch, belated citizens or even Saverny, foolish enough to linger, in spite of her warning that so gaudily a bedizened prey would attract the night-birds.

In the meanwhile, the boom of the bells had ceased to vibrate on the stilly air, and she returned to sit down, with a growing ill humor.

"Late, for once! but so soon in our acquaintance!" muttered she.

Sinking into abstraction, she recalled the events of their meeting and their overpowering affection.

Not sure that the handsome countenance shown her in the Well of Truth at the fortune-teller's was reality or a painting to dupe the patrons of Signora Floretia, Marion returned home haunted by the bright eyes, enrapt as though they beheld a saint; the severe lips

which, however, smiled up to her; and the expression of ecstatic surprise.

"It was a real face," she reasoned.

From that moment, a new idea took possession of her waking thoughts as it did of her dreams.

One early day, she said to herself: "This is what men speak of as Love, and at which I, pretending to be his priestess, mocked in my secret heart and laughed at aloud! I am justly punished. This passion has become my new blood, displacing what ran in my veins before, nay, scorching it up and expelling the wretched ashes! Ashes, like that of my other passions, affections, inclinations, caprices, which this flame seizes upon as fuel, and consumes wherever I had concealed them! Oh, may its flame grow incessantly and purify my poor soul! Yes, I love! a love without bounds, and almost without hope! but it will outlive me—outlive my happiness, if I may speak of happiness, which cannot be apart from this love!"

She was rich and she knew how to command spies. But all her means, as all her envoys, were without fruit.

It is true the seekers of the Truth at the bottom of Signora Floretia's well found Louisette at the other end one day; and they were keen enough to guess that Malargue, seen in her company, had something to do with the underworkings of the magical establishment.

But Malargue, however captivating he might be to a tiring-maid, did not answer the description of the person, judging by the head alone, with which Mademoiselle Delorme had furnished her agents.

On the other hand, Didier, similarly infatuated from that glimpse, had been as unlucky.

On reflection, summing up what little he had heard, he went to Chalons. But the name of Marie is so common that he had his hands full of information on that head. But none were daughters of bailiffs, and he had to conclude that Floretia had made a mistake. But she had spoken the truth. Gabriel Delorme was an assistant of a local court, but, on the flight of his only child to Paris to make her fortune, the worthy man, blessing heaven that he had no wife to share the disgrace, changed his name and went to work at a distance.

An incident, which might have serious results for her, having so far maintained neutrality amid the jars of the court parties, gave her an excuse to "suffer an eclipse." So said the author of that "Garland of Love," rhapsodies inscribed in her honor, of which Saverny had given her what we should term in our days a "presentation copy."

It was intimated to her by the familiar for the time being of Prince Gaston—who changed his bosom friends as often as his suits—that he would be obliged to the reigning beauty if she would afford his Highness a room where he could hold meetings, perfectly private, with his friends. For friends, read "conspirators."

Gaston was perpetually conspiring, but as a King's next brother is expected to be a plotter, that surprised nobody. But his reputation was a miserable one, for eluding the consequences of his failures by "turning King's evidence," so to say, and sacrificing his confederates, to preserve his liberty.

Marion owed her long reign as the court beauty to her having no adviser—no confidant—so she had herself solely to consult. The outcome of her debate with Mademoiselle De-

lorme was that a little clandestine elopement with herself, and residence with that amiable creature in a town very quiet but not too remote, would save her from fine if not imprisonment. The fame of her collection of jewels, she was well aware, must have whetted the appetite of the wives of legal functionaries and she feared that her caskets would look bare if, on any pretext, they were seized with her other effects.

No doubt they would be sealed officially, but she had heard that diamonds and pearls, by some mysterious influence known to the servants of Themis, ooze through the court wax.

Hence, without a word to anyone, she sent her valuables to a safe place of hiding—pawned them with a Jew of the Palais Royal, to be plain—paid her servants a quarter ahead which freed her of them, alleged that the court physician had recommended her the waters of Loches, and started in a coach ostensibly for that watering-place.

But at the barrier, she rid herself of her maid on some fair pretence, left the coach at the first inn, sending it to her coach-maker's to be "repaired," which signified laying up until called for, and posted circuitously until she believed she was no longer to be traced, and lodged at Blois.

She found here, at the hint of a Sister of the Ursulines, to whom, without revealing herself, she spoke of ultimate renunciation of the world and retirement into a nunnery, an old house, formerly a rich merchant's home and warerooms, at a nominal rent, to keep the rats out of the still habitable portion. The nun also recommended Dame Rose, an old pensioner who occupied a small holding in the

suburbs, but was not averse to earning an honest penny to provide her with luxuries in winter. The bishop's housekeeper also gave a recommendation to this pearl of housekeepers, and Marion, totally unaware of this link of communication with Laffemas, her child or grandchild as the case may prove, accepted the attendant as she had the refuge, as a windfall.

As she had been more enwrapped in trying to conceal her incognito, when visiting the necromancer of the Blanchapelle Lane, than in studying her features, she failed to recognise, now that she had doffed the famous mask of which Louissette had launched into praise, what Parisian nine days' wonder she had at her elbow.

It is needless to say that the cunning old hag uttered not a syllable to show that they had met before; to know and not to reveal is power, if one waits long enough to utilise it.

Since Floretia had not been informed of the change of demons in her cellar, she could not recognise in Didier, the young man who had given Marion the greatest emotion she ever experienced.

On this side, therefore, the fugitive had believed herself more than merely safe—she considered her fortune reviving. Truth to say, the glamour of love blinded her to all but the only companion of her solitude.

"How is it that this *nudel*—this pancake of a fop, as Graf von Eisenstein calls him," mused she, "this Saverny has discovered me?"

She believed that Rose had betrayed her, without knowing her identity with the fair fugitive from Paris. Saverny, a profligate, had heard of the good-looking ward of the old dame, and had bribed her to let him

have a peep at her. His surprise was not acting, and it was probable that he had no anticipation of meeting his former acquaintance.

"At all events, after this next interview with Didier," she meditated, "I must change my lodgings and dismiss this hag! She has a treacherous look! Besides, Saverny and his kind are great geese—they are gregarious. I should have them all alight on my porch-roof."

Didier had returned empty-handed to Blois.

He had been found by the sexton of St. Marc's Church, on the steps, one morning. For precaution, not a scrap of linen was on the babe. The man was going to transfer the pitiable creature to the box of the Bons-Enfants, when a woman of the lower class, passing to market, had compassion and swathed the nude being in the flannel with which she had intended to wrap a sitting of eggs.

This woman nursed Didier, brought him up, and when she died, which was in his arms, proved that she regarded him as her son by leaving him her all. It was a goodly sum of money and the deed to some property at the North Gate. Required for defensive purposes during a panic, a threatened invasion of the Spaniards to avenge some slight to Anna of Austria, this piece of land was bought at a good price. Didier found himself master of a thousand livres a year, as he invested it, on which he existed.

His life was bitter and miserable from his loneliness. He traveled through France, feeling too proud to enlist as a soldier, and unable from the absence of proofs of birth to buy a commission in the army.

A youth so unfortunate was inevitably a misanthrope. He hated the men above him,

whose unworthiness he perceived; he despised those below them, and below himself, seeing also their baseness.

"In France, as constituted, there are eagles, hawks and owls. The owls are on the Bench: the eagles subjugate the hawks and make them fetch the prey."

To his clouded mind, human nature was a tarnished mirror, reflecting merely pride, misery and travail. It seemed to him that whatever he came into contact with tore him, and the wound smarted; the world was bad enough, but man was worse!

He returned to Blois, not from any preference, but because he had fancied he should like to be buried near the grave of the only person who had been a true friend to him.

He had gone away a youth; now he was a young man, but appeared aged. He was living there, impoverished, for a gentleman; gloomy and isolated, when came the thought of seeing Paris for the last time and perchance terminating his existence after a round of its pleasures, during which he should squander all his year's income.

It was then he was led into the house of the Blanchapelle Alley Enchantress, and saw Marion Delorme, who had called in disguise. She was too well known and too rarely beautiful for any one but a rustic like Didier not to recognise her, however.

He returned to Blois again, afraid that he had fallen in love and must continue to live, though more wretched than before; then he had sought for her at Chalons. Despairing, he was in his supposedly natal town for what he believed the last time; he went to deposit flowers on the grave of his foster-mother, in

the old burial-ground on the height back of the town.

Fate had not forgotten him. It urged Marion, tired in a few days of her retirement, to make a tour of Blois; she had seen all that she dared look at, for in public she might be recognised. The cemetery was one of the orthodox sights; she repaired there, a resort of the very light-minded or the gravest, which she had heretofore shunned.

But love had filled her with melancholy and a desire to be utterly alone.

Love is a shallow, reckless boy, who likes to point his darts at the Skeleton, and since he is immortal, mock at cypress and yew.

At the turning of a walk, under a clump of weeping willows, she and Didier met as he rose from his devotions at a humble mound.

Her eyes were so tender and her speech of sympathy so sweet, that he ventured to speak to her at length—to tell his story by the resting-place of the only creature who had thrown a smile upon his tearful life.

Marion thought the chance a strange one, for her wildest flight had never pictured their next meeting to be in a churchyard.

She could not, on this ground, treat this passion, betrayed by the naive young man, as in the vein of the hundred love-addresses weekly offered her. His agitation was genuine; she marvelled to see a vigorous, energetic young man wavering and irresolute; and as they sauntered down by the Loire, amid the beating of the clothes on the stones by the washerwoman's paddles and the click-clack of the grist mills, she listened without shrinking to his offer of his heart and his life.

"Is there anything for which you yearn, that

"I can help you toward?" said he with a sincerity almost appalling to one who reckoned a Saverny earnest and a Prince Gaston steady. "Is there a man or an object in your way, to be removed? Have you fixed your wish on something for which a man must die? I would die for it, without a murmur, and believe my blood was well paid for by one of your smiles!"

All his straightforward speech was antagonistic to the set phrases of love-making raging in the city; the stereotyped words, "star," "brazier of affection," "fires of the heart," and the like, taken from the romances of chivalry. It was novel, but she loved him the more for the newness; Marion was a woman who adored singularity.

But she was unable so soon to answer to him with the same gravity.

He rebuked her for her frivolity and for playing with a word of such vast and weighty signification as "Love." He explained to her that the love he meant, was that which becomes the additional essence in the life's blood, the third flow of corpuscles, purifying both the red and the white, and giving a new growth to the soul.

He told her how that glimpse of her, through the magician's trap, had impregnated him with ardent love. His clouded life was immediately gilded as if a new sunlight burst out beside the normal one. All changed to him and the misanthrope could love all mankind—if she were also of them. He doubted that, for she appeared an unknown being of a heavenly species. His rebellious heart had long chafed against his life, but now the burden became a buoy—he felt lifted up so that one day he might attain her level.

Alone, wandering, oppressed, he had struggled and suffered with all sentiments—but one, and that one, like the magician's serpentine-rod, swallowed them all—it was Love.

She pitied him, as he poured out his sad revelation.

What diverse careers! She, born a peasant, had become a queen, more than the Queen regnant, over Parisian society! This man must have come of noble, perhaps exalted origin, to judge by the altitude of his feelings, and he was compelled to vegetate in a third-rate and decaying city. The bar sinister, in his inability to indicate his parents, prevented him rising in the Church, the Army or the Law.

When she acknowledged that she shared his great passion, he drew away, awed. He was afraid that he was deceived—that she deceived herself in thinking that she could love him to the same degree. She asserted that her love was greater—for she knew, and dared not avow—how great was her sacrifice if she gave up all for him—fortune for comparative poverty; fame, of a kind, for obscurity; the most brilliant and liveliest society for the paucity of a country town.

They met every day, usually in the outskirts, where still trees had been spared, and there were those openings in narrow groves which the simple folk call "lovers' walks."

Each day their love grew. Their affection might have dowered a world where love was unknown. It was supreme joy—delight in the extreme which he felt when he knelt at her feet, and they saw the sun go down on another day which was all ecstasy.

But, although he could not doubt his happiness, he doubted her love. Often he had pro-

posed the proof of its extent, marriage, and always she had deferred a decision. He attributed it to his position, an orphan's, without parentage revealed, without money and without a palpable future.

It was, therefore, unheard-of audacity—strange importunity, for him to look up to one he held to be an angel of light in the prime of virtue and beauty. It seemed to him that, when she was at her window, the passers-by ought to go down on their knees to her as to a Madonna in the shrine at the corner.

Often had he asked himself, on returning home from seeing her: "Who am I, crawler among the worms, to disturb this silvery sheet of water, and cull the lily! Why should my vulgar breath tarnish the azure of so serene a spirit?" Her innocence sanctified her in his ignorant eyes, for he had believed her tale that she was in Paris for the first time, and for a day only, when he saw her. She candidly confided in his loyalty and he doubted that he had the right to accept her love; the act would mingle his gloom—his night-like life with her noonday brightness.

Marion had said that she was alone; without brothers, parents or relatives to interfere with her movements. She had allowed him to be her supporter, so to say—why not legalise this acquaintance?

While she deplored her being unworthy of him, lowly though he was, he attributed her shrinking from a definite answer to his own sorrows, impatiently-borne wrongs, and abandoned state.

On the night when Saverny, escaping from the consequences of his first essay in verse, broke in upon the solitude of the self-exiled

beauty, Didier had determined to come to an end with the distressing situation.

He dressed himself for a journey—it was over the stream which poets still styled Lethe, or the Styx. In black from head to foot, he was a tolerably forbidding figure in the old streets at the hour when midnight would strike. If any robbers were abroad, they refrained from challenging the right to be afoot of one who might be a spectre from among the old knights who couched lances with Duguesclin and tried to set Henry of Transtamara on the throne of Pedro the Cruel.

If Old Street had rarely a passenger at his hour for the trysts, the lane up which was Marion's house yet more seldom had its shadows among which glided this lover, like a shade himself, protected by the god of lovers and that aroma of poverty which shields its hapless tribe from the footpad and highwayman.

What was his amaze, therefore, to hear two voices in that room where none but Marion's and his had shaped the monotonous dialogues of the enamored!

His pale cheek reddened and he gripped his sword, that good old blade with which he had vanquished Malargue, and which had been fitted to an ebony handle by a local sword-smith, from its suiting his hand. He paused as if petrified at the foot of the dank wall, under the balcony which formed his stairway to paradise.

But already the two voices, if there were two, were hushed, and one only arose.

To beguile her impatience, Marion had taken up the book of verses in her praise, that "Garland" which Saverny had left, as a wasp leaves its sting, perhaps with the hope that it would

rekindle a desire to rule the gayer part of the capital.

Marion spoke prose as few women of her time could do; she read poetry so that it became music!

Didier, without catching the sense of the words, at this distance, was enthralled by the bare melody. On its ceasing, for Marion laid down the book to sigh, like a queen in exile recalling her coronation-day, he seized the iron lattice-work, and with the agility of a chamois-hunter, climbed up to the open casement, at which he leaped in.

Marion rose. She was alone.

"I entered abruptly," stammered he, regretting his haste; "but I thought—was there not another with you?"

Had he heard Saverny? Was he beginning to play the spy upon her?

She replied, a little as if offended:

"If you heard another voice, it was the housekeeper's—"

"Dame Rose?" said Didier, doubtfully.

"Who but Dame Rose? Her voice is like an old man's, is it not? But never mind how you came—like a shot from a cannon," and she forced a laugh. "Pray, be seated—"

He laid his sword and short cloak on a chair indicated for him, and drew a stool to her feet, where he sat.

For several minutes he contemplated her, without scarcely drawing breath: it was the idolatry of an Oriental.

"I have come to ask you, for the last time, if still you hesitate to give me that reply on my future—would I could say, our future—and why do you hesitate? Let us be wed!"

She hid her face in her hands; hands which

were wont to be so covered with jewels that, in their nakedness of late, they seemed light to her.

"I wished you to think all this over: how we are both cast-offs from society, our country, the world! Let us be the world to ourselves! Let us go somewhere to make a home, under any sky—for where you are that will be heaven, not only above me but all around! Choose a spot! There we will dwell, letting the blind, dull world rest ignorant of true happiness, one that kings might envy!"

"Ah, this would be heaven!" murmured she.

"Realise it! The way to it is through the church!"

He had risen and opened his arms, counting on her acquiescence, but the unhappy woman shuddered and drew away.

"I cannot marry! Never!" faltered she.

Escaping his advancing arms, she fell back, fainting, in her chair.

Didier instantly passed from warmth to coldness.

"I grant," said he, "that the offer is far from generous on my part! But this is enough! Never more will I speak on the subject! Let us say farewell!"

"Cursed be the day when I won his affection!" she murmured, and burst into tears.

He turned round from dashing himself out of the window, careless how Mother Earth received him; at her outburst, he turned.

"You are tearing my heart, Didier," gasped she, making an effort which was a triumph to her self-command, to speak in a firm voice, "but I will make it clear to you—"

"Madam," said he with the same icy tone, "after this decision, I will read nothing but

my book of prayers. Were you reading in *your* breviary when I arrived?"

She continued to sob, breaking down on the verge of some monstrous falsehood which might bridge over this breach.

The book had fallen on the floor, and he trod upon it. He took it up.

"Ha! the 'Garland of Love!' 'Dedicated to Marion Delorme!'" he repeated, the first time without understanding, so far were the present circumstances removed from what he learnt in Paris in his short stay. "The beauty of the court—the idol of the town!" said he bitterly, like one who, loving one woman, wishes all to be of her likeness. "Out on the vile disgrace to her sex!" he cried, hurling the volume out of the window, "what manner of man is this that prostitutes his pen to praise that most impure of creatures?"

Marion started up at the sentence; her cheeks suddenly glowed so that the tears dried upon them before they had half coursed down. She could not have been more flaming red had the executioner applied the burning fleur-de-lis to brand her.

Her eyes flashed like carbuncles, but suddenly she laid her hand on her heart, checked her rage as it almost foamed over, and drooped in all her figure, trembling like an aspen.

So does the caged panther change its mood when, about to leap at an intruder upon its captivity, it recognises it is the trainer.

"How come you—you, of all women, to have such books in your possession? What brought it here—"

"Pure chance, believe me!" said Marion.

"Would you like to know who Marion Delorme is?" continued Didier, with that sombre

fire not long generated in France, and, then, making that Huguenot party which carried Henry of Navarre to the throne in the teeth of the dominant factions. "You have a chaste eye"—she lowered hers to the floor. "You have a gentle forehead—"

How it tingled now!

"Marion Delorme is a woman of faultless frame and deformed heart! A Circe who makes beasts of men; she has a den in Paris to which all comers are welcome; and in these days of mixed politics, when every man is hostile to his brother, she keeps her footing by betraying all her guests to the power that is in the ascendancy. To-day, Marion is for the Cardinal, as yesterday she was for the King! To-morrow she will uphold Prince Gaston, who, it is said, would send his crowned brother into a monastery that he should steal the sceptre! And the next day, Marion would harbor the conspirators plotting to overthrow this king of a day! A Phryne who ensnares men in a Daedalus, where the lieutenant-criminal can lay his hand on them, for she gives him the clue that she may dwell in impunity! Her pretended loves are a shame to them on whom they alight and a horror to the community!"

Marion clasped her hands over her head as though she expected a thunderbolt, or as if these words had the same effect.

Didier looked round suspiciously, when, in the usually tranquil court uprose a clash of swords, a tramp of feet, and outcries:

"Help! thieves! help! murder!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE RE-ENCOUNTER.

The censor turned, astonished at this uproar in the quietude of the most quiet of cities.

The calls for help continued, only they became the more heart-rending; a man had been wounded who uttered such appeals, between the first series and the present, and feared that he would be overpowered.

Didier snatched up his sword from the chair and ran to the window. He had thrown one leg over the iron balustrade when Marion hastened to him and laid her hand on his arm.

Both looked down, and saw in the darkness, for the lamp was still unlighted at the head of the court, a furious whirlwind, so to say, spinning men round a central one, the only light on the scene being that from countless sparks, struck out by swordblades in rapid contact.

"It's a single man whom a score are murdering," said Didier, getting his other foot over the rail and preparing to leap down. But Marion caught him by the cloak and drawing it tight around his neck, he had to wait until released or he disentangled himself. He was straggling, so energetic was her hold.

"Didier, if you love me, do not leave me! They will kill you! Stay, oh, stay!"

"They shall not slay that poor, brave fellow first!" replied Didier, snapping the clasp.

of his mantle, which left it in her hands, and he dropped to the muddy, rounded stones.

The assailed man had reached the doorway, where he placed his back against the protruding pillar and kept his sword in play, like one who esteemed his purse and his blood as precious.

It was Saverny, and these were footpads.

When the marquis was consigned to the hands of Dame Rose, it was in good time to prevent him and the lady of the house being interrupted in their colloquy by Didier. The latter had, in truth, heard their parting words without distinguishing them or the voices.

The old woman was so cunning as not to let him out until Didier, after hesitating, had mounted into the room. Then, remembering the nobleman's present and hoping it would not be the last, she enjoined him to get away quietly and to avoid the dishonest gentry who laughed at the Captain of the Ward and Watch.

"They are noted," she whispered. "They are legitimate descendants of the Scorchers and Flayers whose deeds were a countryside tale when I was a girl—they will not be content with your pretty feathers, but leave you no hide to be buried in!"

Saverny was too curious to learn who had supplanted the bevy of Marion's admirers, to be obedient to this counsel. Ill fell him to linger in the court, trying, by mounting a horse-block on the other side, to peer within the apartment. The casement remained open, but just as he was expecting to catch a sight of Didier's countenance, so far turned from him and to Marion, the mouth of the lane was

blocked up. Escape was now out of the question.

He looked down from his perch and perceived dimly—but a glance sufficed to distinguish the nefarious hunters of Old Blois—half-a-dozen fellows, whose apparel was tattered and whose visages reeked of the wine-shop and bagnio.

Not yet desecrating him, although he was prominently placed, for he was out of the ray from the lamp in the room overhead, the party stopped in the lane mouth, as we have said.

They were commanded by two men, who marshalled their corps so as to cut off the issue.

"We are too late again, Malargue," said the lieutenant, vexedly. "You would stop at the Brazen Lion to have another stoup and there he is, housed, out of our reach!"

"Diego, you are wrong! He has not yet gone up over the balcony—there he is, getting down from that stone!"

All eyes turned to the luckless marquis, who descended from his compromising eminence too late to escape.

"Nay, it is not he," replied the man called Diego, and in whom we may recognise the Matamore of the ambulatory dramatic corps, with whom Didier's second had exchanged swordstrokes to his disadvantage, for he limped from the wound.

"Assuredly not! You are correct! The man we pursued has always been dressed in sable like a mute mourner at a funeral and this popinjay is tricked out as for a wedding! So much the better! He will be more worth the stripping! Draw, and upon him! We may catch the other, too!"

Thus it was that Saverny found himself the

centre of a storming-party which drove him, after inflicting at least one wound of importance, back to the doorway from which he had so recently emerged and which threatened to become a gateway to the Shades.

But, at this juncture, as though the sky had emitted a moonman, Didier fell into the midst of the bristling blades; converted the semi-circle into a rectangle by knocking three or four of them back, in their holder's paralysed hands, and stationed himself beside the marquis.

The latter took advantage of the respite to draw a breath at comparative ease and to stuff his lace collar into his principal wound, on the sword-arm shoulder.

"Stop! back, you poltroons!" said Didier. Then, to the attacked one, he added: "Let us hold firmly and they will be glad to retire! Let us upon them! Away, scum!"

But the robbers stood their ground, and two or three who were keeping the entrance, hastened to their companions' aid.

The combat looked terribly unfair to Marion, who overcame her fear in her anxiety about her lover. She rushed to the balcony, leaning over and still farther holding out the lamp. It threw a flickering radiance over the field.

On the instant, a double outcry of recognition broke from the two leaders of the ruffians and the intervener on behalf of the libeller of the royal barber.

"Captain Malargue, and his Thespian second!" exclaimed Didier.

"The young Cardinalist of the Pont Neuf!" cried the two associates. "Well, you have not your black abbé and your Grey Robe here to

succor you! This time, you and your fop shall die!"

The action was redoubled in violence, for the villains feared that the watch might be attracted, and they would be captured to a man in this court, without an outlet save the one on the main street.

Three thrust against the marquis, already fatigued and weakened a little by loss of blood; four or five, including the captains, upon his defender, while the others, while keeping a lookout for the chance enemy in Old Street, struck in at opportunities.

Marion could bear no more; from her overhead position, the play of the swords looked more evilly ominous than perhaps they were to the fate of her beloved; suddenly, seeing his breast about to become the sheath of Malargue's blade, she uttered a piercing scream, which Dame Rose echoed by sympathy from the wicket in the door, where she inspected the affray. At the same moment, she half threw, half let drop the lamp from her trembling hand.

It was a heavy bronze vessel which might contain a pint of oil. This new kind of burning-shell alighted on the head of the Matamort, felling him, spreading the oil, which ignited, over all his ragged person, and caused a panic in the assailants.

Malargue was carried away by the rush, perhaps without having made too much resistance, for this second meeting with Didier's rapier had left a bad impression upon him again.

In his haste, he tripped on the dragging rope of the street lantern at the alley mouth, and his precipitation being irresistible, he was hurled head foremost against the iron grate

of the cellar window nearest. The iron was rusty and loose; this shock disengaged it from its pins and sockets and he disappeared, like Harlequin, through a hole in the wall.

The rest of his miscreants continued their flight.

Didier surveyed the scene coolly and remarked to the noble, who could now bandage his cut in leisure:

"You are well out of the nick, sir! You may go your way, for those rogues will not stop running this side of the bridge!"

He had not noticed the downfall of Malarque, who, on his part, from prudence or other cause, did not make the slightest sound in his retreat.

Saverny looked up at this deliverer, who was coolly returning into the room from which he had so providentially descended, as if to risk life for a stranger were an everyday occurrence and required no testimony of gratitude.

"Hold, my friend," said he, "I cannot in decency go away without shaking the hand that so handsomely freed me of those incubi! And I must formally thank you, if you do not object!"

"Saverny! It is the inevitable Saverny," muttered Marion, without daring to look over the balcony, which, however, she might have done, in the dark.

Didier leaned over the rail, with ill humor, and replied:

"Make haste, sir, and get you home! I can dispense with your thanks! We are quits!"

"But, in the sacred name of gratitude, I am determined to thank you, and in full, set terms!" retorted the young nobleman, proceed-

ing to scale the wall. "A pretty graduate with all the honors would I be of the Henry the Fourth College of Gentlemen-at-arms to forego such an opening for exhibition of my training in the language of courtesy!" Whereupon, remembering that his arm was sorely cut, he continued to scale the balcony with remarkable grace and quickness.

Marion had run to the door, where Dame Rose, trembling, held out to her another lamp. She seized it.

"Get to bed," said she in a peremptory tone never heard by any servant of hers before.

And she closed the door in the woman's face.

When she turned, Saverny was also in the room, with his sword still out of the sheath.

"Zounds!" said he, flippant as ever, in spite of his hurts. "You are overstepping the rules of good behavior, friend, to save my life and leave me at the door! What odd tyranny! I mean, to leave me at the window! It appears, at Blois, that entrance to a house is as often effected by the one as the other—after midnight! And then, I have to thank the lady who flung a lamp into the enemy's ranks, as Thais of old tossed torches! My compli——"

"Sir, begone!"

"No; never shall it be said of a noble of my house that I was boldly saved by a good gentleman without an interchange of titles. Your name and rank, sir?"

"Didier," answered the other, with growing coldness.

"The rest?" persisted Saverny.

"Didier, and no more! Come, come, they were slaying you and I brought you deliverance. There is no more to that! Be off!"

But the fatuous nobleman was always on

the alert, as becomes his petty world, for trifles; he felt that he was on the threshold of learning what held Paris to the grindstone: the secret of Marion's eclipse. He did not for a moment believe but that "Didier" was a false name to cover one of high degree, for the bearer's loftiness warranted that assumption.

So he planted himself as though he purposed taking root on the Smyrna rug, almost centrally laid down, and said:

"*Corbleu!* As Prince Gaston swears! These are princely airs, forsooth! You little care whether I was done to a vile death by those rascallions, six of them and more, arrayed to slay me under your windows! Six long swords, and six more broad ones, against my little larding-pin!"

Marion had been able up to this point to avoid his eye, settled on Didier, in whom he was trying to identify a courtier. On perceiving her, at last, and at the same time, making no doubt that he might almost buy his peace with the authorities by this true account of the beauty's disappearance, he proceeded:

"But I understand why your mind is so absent. I have deranged a pleasant interview, and I beg your pardon."

Didier was, indeed, inattentive. He was perplexed by this burr sticking to him, like a Chinese who, being rescued from death, is authorised to regard his benefactor as a new parent who must support him for his life.

Saverny profited by this abstraction to whisper to Marion:

"So this is the happy man?"

"You will be my ruin!" she hissed in the same tone, with a blasting glance which ought to

have withered the butterfly. "I am in love—with him—for the first time!"

This last avowal would have melted a heart of stone. But, then, Saverny had little heart, and that of wax.

Didier started. It seemed to him that this intruder regarded Marion with very bold eyes. And, springing between them, he dashed the lamp from the woman's hand just as Saverny was going to take it as an excuse for his approaching her.

They were plunged in darkness, now, excepting the starlight flowing in by the open windows.

"You have put out the light!" exclaimed the marquis.

"Because," responded the man in black, "it is not seemly that the neighborhood, which you aroused by decoying that gang into the quiet court, should see us depart."

"Us? Depart?"

"Certainly! I must escort you out of street dangers! I am not the man to do things half-measuredly! If you please," added he, in a tone of command, "we will go, by the window!"

Saverny felt that it was less an invitation than a menace to throw him out if he protracted his stay. He bowed, though not seen in the twilight; he bowed again more lowly to Marion, and said, aloud:

"Fare-the-well, lady fair!"

"Come!" said Didier, brusquely.

"Still your abrupt manner," said the fop; "but I owe my life to you, and you may count upon my zeal, ardor, and fraternal affection, whenever you need such. I am the Marquis of

Saverny and my townhouse is the Nesle Mansion, Paris."

"Very well," said the other carelessly. He shuddered with fury at this coxcomb having had even a glance at Marion.

Then, gliding in between them, he separated Saverny from the lady and almost shoved him up to the window, where he forced him—that is the word—to climb down, not even offering him a hand, though he must have seen he was crippled.

Marion watched them from the window, two shadows vaguely defined as they left the court for the main street. She was roused from her meditation by a noise and a flare of light where they were last seen. An alarm bell tolled, a shot or two were fired.

The Knight of the Watch had at last collected his platoon and was marching to the alley, where, according to a frightened citizen, an army of the rabble, usually camped in the old mills without the walls, was carrying sack and sword and havoc into the houses of the Old Street, by the passage.

But when his forces arrived, Marion's window was closed hermetically. Her neighbors, roused once more, answered questions very testily. The captain of the archers would have returned altogether empty handed to the Castle but for one of the soldiers perceiving the bursted grating in the adjoining dwelling. A little deeper searching discovered Malargue, in the cellar.

At first they took him to be drunk, having tapped the winecask which brought his descent to a sudden stop. But he was bathed in wine, not sodden with it. His neck was broken. The rope of the street lamp had tripped him, and,

after all—as veraciously as most oracles prophesy—that of the Blanchapelle Cul-de-sac had foretold his doom to a certainty: he had lost his life, thanks to a rope!

When the noise was over, at the withdrawal of the watch with their single corpse as trophy, Marion let Rose undress her, without commenting on the events of the night, however eager the old woman was to engage in conversation.

“These Savernys are rich and splendid,” she thought as she sank on the pillow, but not to repose, “but this other, poor and nameless—I love him!”

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN THEY SAY KING, THEY MEAN CARDINAL.

A goodly number of gentlemen from Paris, by the way of Chambord, where the Duke of Orleans had given them permission to "run the bucks," were assembled around tables set before the Horn of St. Hubert Inn, at the end of the Bridge Street.

It was a favorite inn, as well of the residents who did not share in the reigning monarch's liking for the Chace, as the others.

One look at the kitchen, a view of which could be had from the street, clear through the refectory, sufficed to explain this predilection.

This part of the town, sloping down to the Loire, was picturesque, but the kitchen was Garagantuesque.

It was a real kitchen of the times of Francis I., when men were giants and had ogres' appetites.

It was in an immense hall, larger than the eating-room itself. One stone wall was occupied by "the kitchen battery," that is, all the copper utensils, shining like barbers' basins; the wall opposite gleamed with those pieces of crockery which delight in the pictures of Ostade and the Teniers. The fireplace faced the windows which let in light—here was no mystery to be concealed—on the contrary!

The chimney-place was a vast cavern, but filled with a splendid fire. In its time it had

stained to ebony the outstanding rafters, from which hung all sorts of rejoicing edibles: sausages, hams, spiced and salted tongues, herbs for stuffing, and crocks of lard.

In the gaps, hooks supported baskets and wicker-worked bottles which hinted of sauces, rare cordials, choice wines which had become syrups in an age. The dressers and cupboards were clean and brilliant with daily care, and bore a hundred plates and dishes in course of preparation which would have delighted a dyspeptic. Under the mantel-piece, shone and sparkled the fire furniture, such as the pokers, tongs, spare spits, roasting-jack; enormous kettle for soup when a party had the large table. The flaming brands sent their rays all over the room, capacious though it was, deepening the shadows between the beams, casting a roseate glow on the blue delf and making the regiment of copper pans glitter like a brassy wall.

Homer or Rabelais would have exclaimed:

"This kitchen is a system of which the fire is the sun!"

It was a world, where bustled to and fro a republic of men and women, to say nothing of animals. The cooks, the turn-spits, the vegetable maids, the scullions, the pan-scourers, the dish-washers, the pastry-cook and his helps, the confectioner—threading their way, like the ball in Tivoli, among the hissing and bubbling pans, the spluttering frying-pans, the long row of joints, fowls and fish on the silvered rod, revolving with solemn gravity before the brazier, and weeping dolefully but grandly into the series of pans which caught the delectable juice.

Foremost of all was the landlord of the

Horn—a veritable Horn of Plenty! he was—as it should be—Cook, Vinter and Host; he superintended the whole.

“Mens agitat molem!”

On account of the accession of company the usual riot had grown into a tempest; the servants and cooks shouted and bawled; the women wrangled; the turnspit dogs barked and howled as the hot grease drops flew upon their sleek hides; the roasting-jacks groaned as they specially cooked the venison for the hunters; the water-butt in the corner ran musically; the flagons and glasses jingled; the bottles rattled and the mincing-knife worked, like a distant anticipation of the guillotine on the Place de la Concorde!

But the tumult at the door was as animated.

The residents criticised the fashions of the sportmen, and they joked at the Bloisians being a hundred years behind the mode, although only forty leagues from the capital.

The courtiers, ravished at the excitement they produced, for each minute brought more customers to the Horn, spread themselves like peacocks, speaking loudly, and assuming extravagant attitudes, especially when women passed the row of tables.

But, alas; what the men from Paris used in the way of language was almost Hebrew! What did the good souls of Blois know of the reasons why orange and blue should be the colors of the day? What mattered that Ast should be made a duke, at last? What cared these placid gentry about thirty Huguenots having been hanged, somewhere, with their London-printed Bibles round their necks? And the names were unknown to them of the gallants who had run away from a wife or

with one—from a duel or to one; who feasted, loved, fought as if the next year would be that when, according to a worthy Carthusian, the world would come to an end.

"Excuse me," said the Captain of the Watch, presuming on his military capacity to accost one of the chatterers, "but, Captain Gasse, as I hear you cited, may I inquire what is the news from the army?—I have a son before Figuière."

The captain, who was sore at his costume being ridiculed by friends, who had poked fun at his buttons and shoulder-knots as being "out," looked hard at the speaker, but reflecting that he was sent to Blois to report to the garrison commander and this might be a comrade, answered civilly enough, but not very satisfactorily, in a careless voice:

"Why, sir, I believe we have surprised Figuière, or that Figuière has surprised us! Wait a minute—yes, they have taken it from us!"

"What does the King say to that?" questioned a bystander, stopping in the act of curling his mustache to look at the effect by a small mirror set in the comb.

"My dear Brichanteau, the Cardinal does not like it the least bit."

"Here is Bouchavannes!" cried several voices as a gentleman, followed by a groom, stopped on seeing familiar faces, and dismounted.

"What is the news of the court—the health of their Majesties?"

Bouchavannes shook off the dust, sat on a table to allow a servant of the hostelry to pull off his riding boots, and replied:

"The Cardinal has a touch of the gout, caught at the Siege of La Rochelle and not

curable by its salts, ha, ha! and he goes about in a litter!"

"So you came off first best in that affair with Arquien?" asked a gentleman who insisted on the cavalier sharing an immense flagon of wine with him.

"It was not I who fought with Arquien, but my cousin, Caussade, he was mixed up with the quarrel of the Brissacs with the Soubises."

"What about?" cried the chorus.

Bouchavannes wiped his lips with a scented lace handkerchief and replied:

"An absurd race between a hound and a horse! A mere nothing. My cousin was killed, for the fun of duelling, which is revived."

"Revived? I thought the Cardinal had suppressed it!"

"The Cardinal!" repeated Gasse, "I see that we all must say 'Cardinal!'"

"It is the mode!"

A tall man, clad in black velvet, fringed with silver, and, on close inspection, his buttons of the same metal were seen to be moulded into fool's-heads, though they looked like the royal *fleur-de-lis*, spoke out at this:

"The Cardinal prohibited duelling in the King's name; now, he will prohibit under his!"

The gallants looked at one another; and they whispered:

"That is Langely, the King's jester. What is he doing here? He was not with us, at the hunt!"

"I suspect," said Brichanteau, "that he is here on the wild-goose chase!"

"What wild-goose chase?" asked his neighbor.

"Why, where have you been buried, Roche-

baron, not to have heard of the disappearance of Marion Delorme, the fairest of the fair!"

"Yes," said the chorus, "she has left Paris! And, remarkable, none of consequence has left it at the same time!"

"She has been all things—now she has turned politician!"

"She is not such a fool!" said Langely in his grave voice.

"Why do they not offer a reward for her?" said Bouchavannes.

"Or set a company of scouts a-horse to discover her?" said Gasse. "I would founder my barb to run her to earth!"

"I should win the reward, boys!" interrupted a fresh voice, and a young man bounded into the midst of the revellers, and struck the attitude of a male dancer after a pirouette.

"Saverny! the marquis! We thought you were in prison!"

"I, for what?"

"That libel about the royal shaving!"

"I have certain word," replied Saverny coolly, "that it was composed by a secretary whom I discharged! I, capable of witty lines, lines that have good rhythm, and which rhyme! You do not know me to accuse me of that vile work!"

"True!" said Rochebaron, shaking his head. "I did not for a moment believe that Saverny wrote a line of it! It was so good!"

In the midst of the laugh at the remembrance, Gasse broke in:

"But the marquis says that he has the key to the miracle, the prodigy which threw a damper over Paris! He ran away with Marion!"

"No, no," protested the coxcomb, "I was only

seeking her. The fortune-teller of Blanchapelle Lane informed me that she had fled alone! and gave me the clue to her whereabouts! Gentlemen, Marion is here!"

A roar of incredulous laughter shook the tables.

The leader of society at Blois, the antipodes of Paris, where they had but to look around to see that all was old, dingy, rusty and cramped.

The towers of St. Nicholas had an awkward and provincial air compared with Nôtre Dame's.

"I tell you that she is here, for I have seen her."

"Hidden here? Then she has some *grand amour!*"

"I do not know how great Don Cupido is," went on the marquis, enchanted at being the center of all ears and eyes, "but she has a bold and brave gallant. The thieves took me by the collar, one night, in these noisome streets, up there, a dozen all told, who wanted to tell the time by my watch and be my almoner with my purse. While I was crossing swords with them—as many as could get at me—a man sprang from the house where Marion was sheltered, and dispersed the banditti."

"Tell your tale to Corneille, the new poet who has revolutionised the stage with his 'Cid,' and he may make a drama of it."

"But for this hero, it would have been *my* tragedy," said the marquis, patting his shoulder where the wound still stung.

"Well, who is he?"

"I have been hunting for him, while you were after the deer, for I long to renew our acquaintance!"

"If he is in love with Marion, why not go to Marion's? That is the way to kill two birds with the one stone," said the brilliant Bouchavannes.

"But she has given up her dwelling! She dismissed her solitary servant, and she fled—"

"Returned to Paris?"

"Impossible! Marion is too well known to pass the City bars without the officers of the civic taxes recognising her!"

"That is true, Saverny!" said Gasse. "The idea of my deploring my transfer to Blois, and Marion is here! Come here, boy!" he said coaxingly to Saverny. "Tell me how far you followed her traces, for I will take them up, having nothing else to do!"

"Why, I thought you were sent here, on active service?"

"*Active* service, in Blois!" and Gasse yawned plainly. "Alack!"

"Does he persist," struck in Bouchavannes with his eyes toward the kitchen, whence issued the delicious odor of roasting venison. "Does he persist that Marion is here, incognito?"

Whereupon several accompanied the speaker and hemmed Saverny in with chairs, so that he had to repeat his story of the nocturnal adventures, with such embellishments as would enhance his importance.

Beside them a dispute of quite another stamp was rising.

In all times the star ascending has upholders who try to decry the constant supporters of the declining one.

The old school and the new were in opposition on the stage and in the library, for plays were readable in those days. Corneille, at a

bound, impossible to divine from his "Gallery of the Law Palace" or "Mélite," built on the ancient lines, had attained the elevation when he could be aimed at, by his "Cid."

The style was mocked at from its familiarity. He spoke of forbidden things and called spades by their name at a period when the Quality tried to be diverse from the populace by using paraphrases. The new playwright's "Cid" offended the established canons, particularly in wedding the woman whom he loved; this had never before been seen in tragedy. The grand tragedy was still "Pyramus" and "Bradamante," or Mairêt's "The Last and Great Soliman." Scuderi was cited as able to crush Corneille at a stroke of the pen. What a bold and vain spirit had this innovator, to boast of inventing when everything had been created by Garnier, or Hardy, or "*the* Théophile!" In fact, the whole Academy had not a member but could out-write this upstart.

Chapelain the satirist was at the head of one set, deriding the idea that the famous minds had not exhausted all topics, and Goden, Bishop of Grasse, could only defend the new genius by averring that he might write some piece worthy of attention if he would abide by the good old plans and remember Aristotle!

As for the people, the play-going public was but a thick wall on which the drama was superficially frescoed.

As for society, it was composed of sceptics: they would have shrugged their shoulders and laughed at any one who suggested that nature repeats even her grandest effects; that there might still be a Charlemagne, vast, poetic and almost fabulous in verve, one that would be to their Corneille and Molière and to our Shake-

speare, what Napoleon the Great is to Charlemagne.

"At all events," said Brichanteau, eager to get away to dinner, "let us sum this up. Granted that your Corneille is a fellow of merit and to be esteemed, he is of the minor nobility with a name smacking of vulgarity!"

"He comes," added Bouchavannes, "of a family of pettifoggers, who clipped ducats to lay up pence!"

"Gentlemen," said another, who had listened patiently, "if the public like this new-comer's rhapsodies, all is over with high art. The theatre will go to the dogs, and to see a good old play, we will be compelled to go to the country fairs where, I trust, for a long while will be harbored in the traveling booths the sacred traditions. Say what you will, my opinion is that this Corneille has been set up to kill off the established plays in order to give a clear stage for the still newer sort—"

"What! worse after Corneille?" was the general cry.

"Certainly, after Corneille! Has not my Lord Richelieu in his portfolio two or three tragedies—"

A few faces smiled; one man laughed, but instantly turned it off as a cough; they all became grave, and Gasse whispered:

"Say 'My Lord' without naming names or speak in a lower tone!"

"Yes, hush! my dear Villac! Who knows but the Bloisians are redhot Cardinalists?"

The townspeople had crowded round the debaters, the subject being a novelty to them.

But Villac had been an early arrival; as a kind of amateur steward to the party, having selected the Horn of Hubert for the sportsmen,

he had, as usual with lovers of the table, tasted the wine. So with a flushed face, glad in turn to be under the eyes of the natives, he cried, in the reverse of a whisper:

"Basta! Down with oppressors and suppressors of free speech! The devil fly away with the Scarlet Robe! Has not his Eminence enough of a field with the Army, the Navy and the floor of Parliament to leave playgoers their stage! Why should he impose himself on our tongue?"

"He is right," subjoined Bouchavannes, likewise excited. "Death and downfall to this Richelieu, who is making but a poor place of France! He abates and he rends! His scarlet mantle is only fit to hide his gory hand!"

"I stand by ye!" said Rochebaron, rising unsteadily, for he had been calming his appetite with bumpers of Gascony wine, "with such a monopoliser, what is the use of the King?"

"The King," said Brichanteau, delighted at the sensation thrilling the crowd at all these tirades, and desirous to outdo his foregoers, "the King is just a lantern who saves the flame, Richelieu, from the tempest by his tarnished glass! The people follow the light, not knowing—not caring that it is veiled and that the glass is not the source of effulgence!"

"Welcome the day," said Bouchavannes, "when with our swords we snuff this flame!"

"Snuff some flames," remarked the royal jester, "and they burn but the brighter!"

No one laughed; the whirlwind had to blow itself out, and the silence of the hearers was taken by the young men as approbation.

Bouchavannes unfolded his arms and made the movement of embracing his friends.

"Ah! if everybody thought as I do, about

this head, it would not be long before—”

“Let us arrange to—” began Brichanteau at the sudden stoppage of the other haranguer.

“To give him a good mortal stroke!” said Bouchavannes, bringing his fist down on the table and breaking a flask of cordial by the shock.

Langely rose at his table. His black suit lengthened his tall figure. His buttons jingled *flat* as he said in a lugubrious voice:

“A conspiracy!” he cried out. “Young hearts, remember the Marillacs!”

“The victims of Laffemas and Laubarde-mont,” muttered the bystanders, shuddering.

Michel and Louis de Marillac were brothers, whom the Queen Mother, Maria de Medici, had patronised and lifted to power. Michel had become Keeper of the Seals and Louis was given the charge of the Army in Italy.

After “the Day of Dupes,” when Richelieu turned the tables on the coalition of his enemies, namely, the Old Queen, the present one, Prince Gaston, and all their allies, his first strokes in retaliation were to cast down their favorites. He had the seals of state taken away from Michel de Marillac, who was banished from the capital. Marshal Schomberg was ordered to arrest the other Marillac, even in head-quarters, and he brought him to the Cardinal, at Rueil.

Marillac’s relatives sued for mercy; Maria and Gaston vowed that any harm done their friend would be amply repaid; they averred that they answered for him with blood and property and that they would not allow the least injury to be done him.

The warmest supporters of the Prime Minister flinched.

"He is a genius," acknowledged their associates, "but, see! He is becoming a tyrant!"

Brother Joseph argued with his superior.

"Joseph," said the statesman, "this Marillac was chosen by the Old Queen to assassinate me, if the Colonel of the Corsican Guards hung back, just as Guise and Ancre were done to death!"

"If it is personal reprisal, then I dispute no more," said the Capuchin.

"By Saint Francis!" cried Richelieu, incensed, "to use your own oath! This system of tempering the rule of France by Italian bravoes must end! I am not going to fall beneath the knife of a Clément or a Ravailiac! Chalais was a mere poppingay to Marillac, but I will make as short shrift of one as the other!"

"Chalais was a puppet of the court! The people did not care for his passing away, any more than for a feather out of the King's cap! But, Marillac!"

"Marillac has plundered the people and the realm," continued the Premier.

"Perhaps the accusation was calumny," said Joseph, feebly, for it was not his wont to contravene his principal with pleas of mercy.

"His malversation is abundantly proven. I have sheaves of evidence! He is a traitor. He was in communication with the Duke of Lorraine!"

"Hard to prove that!"

"Laubardemont holds the proof!"

"He can prove anything!"

"Besides," said the Minister, with a slight smile, "who but Marillac sent to Rome that word against you, brother, which so long delays the cardinal's hat!"

Joseph felt his pale cheek glow. He bowed and merely faltered:

"Marillac no more plundered than other generals. Soldier—robber! He laughed at the charge of peculation, saying that the fine would always be more than his property, howsoever acquired!"

"He has stolen enough to bring to the block the head of a Marshal of France," replied the other determinedly.

Marillac was condemned to death for his inroads on the Treasury, under an act which his brother Michel had drawn up. He was decapitated a few days afterwards, to the gratification of no one but the peasants whom the Marshal had borne hard upon, after the manner of all the Great Captains of that period. Contemporaries attributed the deed to a personal enmity of Richelieu.

But whatever the popular opinion, the recollection was sombre and the spectators of the courtiers and the royal jester trembled as they eyed the latter, who sat down quietly, after his reminder, having cast round him dire consternation.

Those who had found chairs resumed their seats, and drinking went on, but without gusto.

"Is that dinner never to be served?" said several. "Are we to go on forever with our tongues hanging a yard out of the mouth?"

"Coming!" returned a head-waiter at the door; "remark, gentlemen, that a dinner for such a distinguished party is not a light affair!"

"Don't let it be heavy!" said Langely.

The laughter was sincere this time, and some minutes passed merrily.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ROYAL EDICT.

But the Chevalier de Villac, intoxicated to the stage of nursing a fancied wrong, suddenly said to his neighbor, though they had been hobnobbing and toasting Marion:

"My dear Montpesat, you used language about my protégé Corneille, a while ago, which tingles yet in mine ears!"

"What did I say? for, on my honor, I have forgotten!"

"I—I will not sully my lips by repeating the insults," replied Villac, who had, in fact, forgotten the words also, "but they must be answered for."

"Do you mean with the——"

He slapped his sword-hilt.

"Just so!"

"Or do you prefer the pistol?"

"Both," said the chevalier.

They rose, locked arms and staggered among the revellers, with a view of seeking a quiet corner. But they had to pass the table where the royal jester sat alone.

He thrust out his long leg to bring them to a halt, and said:

"A duel? Hark ye! There is a new order before the King for his signature! It may be promulgated by this hour! Remember how the Lord of Boutteville lost his head for having put his hand once too often to his sword after the like prohibition!"

The two dropped their arms, dismayed, and

suddenly changing mood, as men will do in wine, cried in unison:

"The fool is right, and we are fools—to want to fight about this scribbling play-wright! To the deuce with Corneille!"

As they returned to their places, partially sobered, a citizen asked who had made bold to slide his chair among the courtiers:

"Who is this bland but grave gentleman, all in black? He sends the cold shivers down my back!"

"That, sir, is M. Langely, the King's liege buffoon. He has many another fool in all France, but they are not bound by his wages!"

"I am not astonished, with such a sad merri-man, that the King—long life to him!—is so melancholy!" said the citizen.

"Faith! the Bloisians are looking up," said Bouchavannes. "Let me explain, sir! This fool of the King's is suspected to be more of a Cardinal's man than the King's—hence his humor!"

Langely had not resented the observations on himself; but, at this reflection on the Prime Minister, he rose, bowed and said:

"Have a care, gentlemen! Our mighty ruler is a mower who traces a wide swathe; the blood gushes liberally where his blade has swept, but he has only to spread his blood-colored mantle over the remains, and who dare speak a word? No one! All is over!"

A silence ensued, during which nothing was audible but the ceaseless noise and bustle in the kitchen where the dishing up was beginning. In the large room, the tables had been lengthened by joining them, and all the napery of the inn was called into requisition,

"Beside this jester," said Rochebaron, guardedly, "grim Pluto is a jolly companion!"

The dishes began to clatter and the plate to clink as the table was set.

"Gentlemen!" said the host, appearing, rubicund and smiling from ear to ear, on the threshold: "You are served!"

A rush was made for the room, and, for a few minutes, all was confusion out of which order gradually emerged.

The repast was worthy of the Hubert's Horn. The table was covered with the dishes, done to a turn, and the vessels for the divers liquors.

All serious subjects were dismissed, and for a while glasses and cups clinked and clattered, and knives and forks played.

In the stillness which follows the outset of a meal at which are engaged cavaliers after a hunting party, the open space before the inn was covered by a mob. Citizens had hurried from the town in every part on hearing the town herald's trumpet-call at the bridge head.

This musical annunciator was reinforced by a brother, who wore the royal blue and had a fleur-de-lis'd flag pendant from his trumpet. The two were escorted by a united troop of city watch and the light horse of the garrison.

The Sheriff presided civilly over the procession, with four javelin-men, one of whom carried a kettle-drum with which he beat a roll for silence after the trumpet blast.

"Here, here," cried Captain Gasse, disturbed in dissecting his slice of haunch. "Have you no public square but this to exercise your crier's voice within!"

The host had waddled to the doorway and exchanged a word of enlightenment with the Sheriff.

"Please ye, gentlemen," said he, turning his red face round, "it is a royal proclamation and must be published in all the public ways. This is the first open place from the bridge, and, besides, all Blois, I do believe, has collected here, under my windows, to see your worships do justice to my dinner!"

"Order and silence!" shouted the town crier, "for a proclamation of the King!"

"The King!" sneered Bouchavannes, still sullen, and looking to see where Langely was. He had remained at his table at the door. "That is a royal mantle which cloaks Richelieu."

The drum beat and the trumpets flourished, and the crier in a nasal voice bawled, without regard to punctuation—which, to confess the truth, did not exist in the document:

"Ordinance, by his Majesty and his Council assembled! Louis, by the Grace of God, King of France and of Navarre, to all present to whom this comes, Greeting!"

He made a bow, and the drum and trumpets prolonged their task to give him a breathing spell.

"Having considered that every ruler wishes to exterminate duelling by severe penalties, and that, notwithstanding the edicts signed by the Kings our foregoers, duelling is more prevalent at present than heretofore, WE ordain and command that, henceforward, as duellists are felons who deprive us of our subjects by taking their lives, they are to be brought before our courts, or if one survive, that sole survivor, and tried for the misdeed. If found guilty, he or they are to be hanged high in the

air with a short rope! Noble or baseborn, hanged! To make this edict more efficacious, be it also known that WE renounce for this kind of crime OUR right to grant pardon. This is OUR good pleasure!

"Signed:

LOUIS."

A loud cheer drowned the drum and trumpets, breaking out again.

"Wait," said the crier, lifting his hand. "It is countersigned: RICHELIEU!"

The cheer was as loud, but not as sincere or spontaneous as the former; it was Langely who led it off with his stern voice.

Captain Gasse was a valiant trencherman, and a brave soldier; but the reading of the edict ran counter to his appetite. After a few attempts to finish his platter, he pushed it back, with the indignation burning in the other courtiers, and said:

"Gentleman, this has spoilt my share of the feast! The idea of hanging gentlemen like the Thieves, Penitent or Impenitent!"

"Stuff!" said Bouchavannes, setting down his glass of Burgundy untasted. "Hang us? I prithee, where is the hemp grown with which the rope is made to hang a noble?"

"Never mind the detail," said Langely in his cutting tone. "Perhaps by a little bribe you may have a silken cord, as, I have heard of, in other countries!"

The crier had continued his delivery by announcing that the edict was to be published further by copies affixed to prominent objects. He took one of these to be the post to which horses might be attached, at the inn door. A varlet hung the paper, stretched on a frame

and glazed with scraped horn to defy the weather, to the post by a string.

"Mark," proceeded the caustic jester, "they give you a sample of what follows by *hanging* the proclamation!"

"Would he were there who made it!" said Bouchavannes, but, luckily, his voice was thick from his not having cleared it with his wine, and his neighbors pretended not to hear the treasonable utterance, to which, as Saverny remarked, his ballad was milk-and-water!

The dinner went off badly. The wine turned sour, and one by one the carousers withdrew, under pretext of seeking lodgings for the night, the inn being full.

No one was bold enough to propose riding towards Paris after dark.

The marquis' adventure with the footpads in the heart of Blois gave a taste of their daring. How much bolder would they be in the woods through which ran the Paris Road?

"Cousin Saverny," said Brichanteau, as a choice knot of the gallants sat out at the inn door in the twilight, "talking of thieves, did you say you had exhausted all means to discover the hero who rescued you from that band the other night!"

"That is what I said. I have vainly made inquiries throughout the town. The footpads, with the exception of one, the captain—save the mark!—who was found with a broken neck in a neighboring cellar—the gallant, Marion,—all have vanished like a nightmare! with apologies for misusing that simile for a lovely dream-like Marion the peerless!"

"None of your ancestors were more neatly plucked from under the scimeter of the Saracens, I warrant!" said Gasse.

"True, captain! and to think that I should not know him again. I followed him indoors, but, you will understand, he upset the lamp, as I was relieving the lady of it, and a darkness, like that Egyptian, made us all blackamoors in the eclipse."

"Strange conduct!" said Brichanteau.

"I suppose you exchanged names?" queried the captain.

"I have his as 'Didier.'"

A peal of laughter went round the welkin encircling the marquis.

"Is that the name of a Christian?" cried the same gentleman who had objected to "Cornelle," as being vulgar. "That is very low, quite common!"

"He called himself so. A name for a warrior in arms with his visor down! Many victors of blue blood may wear brighter names, but a braver heart is not in their breast! I had a dozen brigands laying it on to me. He was beside a woman—Venus—Marion Delorme, and he quitted her, ye nymphs of Lesbos! to leap into the ring of steel, and save me. My debt is enormous, and I vow, before ye all, to repay it!"

He held up his hand in a gesture worthy of an actor in "the *Horaces*."

Langely's dry laugh echoed along the street.

"Since when has the Marquis de Saverny paid his debts?" said he.

This time the applause was merry and hearty.

"Those which blood may pay," retorted the spendthrift, proudly, "I have always liquidated. My heart is my mint, and its drops all the coin with which I can close my accounts."

"Bravo!" said his friends.

The night came on densely. Within, the kitchen, though reposing, so to say, after the effort of the grand banquet, so ill-appreciated through no fault of its own, glowed redly like the forge of the Cyclops. The turnspits, taking the air in their vacation, at the door, seemed like Cerberus' whelps.

The windows throughout the town, particularly on the upper part, glittered; the good citizens there had no fear of being overlooked. A lamplighter, carrying his ladder so that he bore an unpleasant resemblance to the executioner, took in the tavern in his peregrination, and—no doubt, pursuant to an order—attached a spare lantern to the tying-post over the placard.

The host ordered a waiter to hang a couple of stable lanterns over the tables where the remaining members of the hunting party slowly imbibed their hot wine, with little of that gaiety usual after a good dinner.

"That beast of a proclamation," commented the landlord, to his head-waiter. "It makes them see black!"

"Rather, it makes them see red! It means bloodshed, master! To order men of the sword not to fight, compels them to do it, in order to show they are superior to paper and ink!"

"Nevertheless, Cardinal Richelieu has been a gallant knight. I was at the Siege of La Rochelle——"

"You, at the Siege, master?" cried the waiter, incredulously.

"Yes, I was sutler to the Swiss Guards."

"Which attended the King, and did no fighting! I understand."

"Well, this statesman at whom these swords-

men sniff, and backbite, he went under fire as if he were shot-proof!"

"What would be the use of being a bishop, or a cardinal, unless you could feel that your gown shielded you from the heretic's bullets!" said the waiter, piously.

As his master was about to retire within doors, he laid his fat hand on his arm, and added:

"While on the subject of heretics, I think that we are mistaken about the young couple in the parlor with the two sleeping-rooms. They are not lovers."

"No?"

"But he is a theologian and she his pupil. I caught a speech or two he was making as I came down the stairs, the other day, and—zookers! it was preaching, for a hundred francs!"

"Ah, she is too beautiful to stand in need of preaching! If ever an angel face covered an angel soul, that woman has them!"

"It used to be so! when the sons of Adam courted angels!" replied the waiter philosophically. "But that was at a distance and Womankind, a comprehensive word, master mine, inasmuch as it includes *kind* woman, and, alack! the other kind! Womankind wear any face. How often the fairer the face the blacker the heart!"

"Saucepans and smokejacks! how you talk! but, then, any one can guess that you have been twice married!" rejoined the host. "But," he resumed, interrupting himself, as he looked up the broad and massive stairs, "stand aside, for here comes the young gentleman whom you accuse of being a theologian. Faith, his step, like his garb, is funereal! You may be right,

after all! However, the money of a heretic is as good as a faithful believer's, and he has paid up to the mark!"

It was Didier who came down the broad stairs.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DUEL UNDER THE NOOSE.

Jealousy was easily aroused in a moody heart like Didier's; he could not say that Marion had sought the glances of the intrusive Saverny, but it struck him that they were not perfect strangers. But his love was at that pitch when he was fearful of offending his idol by putting questions to which the frank answer or the elusive reply might endanger his happiness.

Lovers may not be perspicacious, but they are always aware that they live in a palace of ice—a hot breath may crack the wall and the whole shiver to atoms.

So he made no more than a passing remark on this dangler who would persist in forcing his person on their company, and at the first word from Marion, who shared the desire of obscurity with him, to the effect that her abode was not tranquil, he volunteered to seek one more suitable.

He was minutely acquainted with Blois, but he had some difficulty in finding a house remote and yet not exposed to the attack of the poachers, also robbers, who dwelt in the forest and plundered isolated dwellings without the walls.

But having found such a one, he furnished it, and spite of Marion's disinclination to matrimony, it was understood between them that they should be married on the eve of entering it.

She became gloomy after this decision, which he hoped would make her joyous, but she was taxing her wits how to execute her part in the ceremony under a false name and provide the necessary papers to back up her subterfuge.

In the meantime, Didier engaged rooms at the Horn of Hubert.

He was far from foreseeing that this house, so quiet at the time, would become the centre of all the noise in Blois as soon as the aristocratic party having Prince Gaston's leave to hunt in Chambord Forest, should choose it as their resting-place.

Hence, nothing was more untoward for the lovers, who had selected the Horn for a nest of peace, than to hear not only the revelry after the tumult of preparations for the feast, but the uproar of the mob hailing the publication of the royal edict.

"It is a proclamation of some sort," said Didier, as nightfall came, when they habitually took their strolls. "I will look at it and tell you as I return. This time you must not go out. There has been a feast of some sort below and I see many a strange face."

He did not add that he believed that he had spied the Marquis of Saverny among his Parisian friends. Fops wear a family likeness, as they are of the mode very modish, and he might be in error. But the manners of the gallant irritated him, and he had a longing to be quits with him for having entered Marion's apartments and stared at her, if not ogled her, in the brief space before he upset the second illuminator.

He passed through the hall and slowly went out upon the street. No one noticed him, the gentlemen being deep in chat, of a sombre

kind, thanks to the late tragic interruption and chewing its bitter cud.

For ten years past, Richelieu had been pursuing the policy inculcated by Brother Joseph in his sermon on the night of Ramire's disappearance. The oldest nobles trembled for their sons whose family trees bid fair to be trimmed *à la* Cardinal, and they saw with sorrow, mingled with indignation that, as they suffered a change and abasement, the ecclesiastical, clerical and legal branches of the octopus interlacing France were also pruned, without their being advantaged.

Didier went by the party, half-recognizing Saverny, and took an unoccupied seat at the same table as Langely, who sipped some hypocras alone, so dreaded was the malicious jester now that all had a taste of his wit.

"The mandate against duelling is all very well," observed Bouchavannes, "if it bore upon the swashbucklers and pick-quarrels, but the tag at the tail spoils it, like a spluttering flourish after a plain signature."

"What flourish?" said Saverny, absently.

"I mean that the offenders are to be hanged!"

"It is hard to believe it," said the marquis. "The rope is quite a correct treatment for common folk, but this must be a jest!"

"Did you not hear it read? Well, read it!" and he pointed to the placard on the post.

"It is too far off," said the coxcomb, gaping, "and I am too fatigued to go there. Hey," he cried half-saucily, half-goodnaturedly to Didier, "you who are beside the fool! My dear fellow, pray spell me out that proclamation."

Didier looked, not at him, but at Langely, whom he heard characterized as a fool and comprehended by the buttons that he was at

table with a court dignitary more respected than many another functionary. King Louis did not laugh often, but when he did the jest was a sanguinary one.

"You, sir, in the large cloak! You are not deaf, are you?" said Saverny, piqued at being ignored.

He had not recognized Didier from the short time when the light shone upon him in the room; in the street, he had not seen the color of his eyes even.

His voice grated on Didier, who began to recall its tones of silly conceit and arrogance. Lifting his head slowly, he fastened his gaze on the marquis, who might well be daunted by their increasing intensity, enlarging in the dark.

"Are you addressing me?" he curtly demanded.

"Nobody else! I do not mind paying for your refreshment if you will read me that paper over your head."

"I?"

"You, provided you can read writing!"

Didier rose calmly, not as if eager to oblige Saverny, but to enlighten himself. He read the document through without moving his lips and remarked negligently, to his table companion, not to the questioner:

"It is a royal edict, which punishes with the gibbet all wielders of the sword, whether low-born or of high degree."

"It is equality before the gallows," said Langelé. "The world is progressing!"

"You are blundering, good fellow!" said Saverny. "Know that a good gentleman is not doomed to be hanged. His privileges for-

bid that! We have rights to far different deaths—only the base can be hanged!”

He turned to his friends, laughing insolently. “This is one of the shopkeepers of Blois! He is impudent. You read it wrongly, my man!” continued he. “I daresay your broad-brimmed hat cast a shade over your eyes! Take it off, when replying to your betters! You will read better and run less likelihood of incurring the lash! Off with your hat, sirrah!”

Didier took a step so hastily and violently towards him that he overturned a table in the way and the glasses, partly emptied, rolled, breaking, to Saverny’s feet, where the lees spirted on him. He sprang up and thus confronted Didier, who still marched on.

“Have a care, sir!” said the Bloisian, willing to avenge his enmity against the marquis on one of his station; “you insult me! I read the proclamation for myself. Now, I will read it for you, but I claim to fix the adequate compensation. I will read it, sir, but you must pay me in blood! I will have your life!”

“Baiting” a citizen was a sport well known to the courtiers, but rarely had the game turned on the hunter with such vehemence. All rose to their feet and, seeing the seriousness of a combat after this severe prohibition, they tried to quiet the marquis.

Didier had suddenly become cool; some men, after the provocation is launched, are free of bile and in the best health for the sequel. Face to face with Saverny, he remembered him unmistakably, for he said:

“I am not making an error in one thing! You are Nazaire, Marquis of Saverny! And I am a-thirst for your blood, d’ye hear!”

The noble laughed in his face.

"He has divined my quality!" said he, sneering. "Our race-mark is imprinted on our brow! I guessed he was of the lower orders, and he recognises I am a lord!"

"On many a fighting ground," responded Didier loftily, "the blood of the lowborn and the lordling have mingled without France repudiating either! Let us mingle our blood, marquis, if you please!"

"The Edict!" said several voices, while the host and his waiters blocked up the door. "'Ware the Edict!"

"Was ever so much quarrelling?" said the landlord. "This time, my good fare has turned sour in the mouth!"

"They did not take enough of it," commented the waiter. "But they will be punished," added he; "it looks as if two of them will take their parting-cup under the gallows-tree!"

Saverny had become serious at this stage.

"You are too hasty, sir," said he to the challenger. "At least, let this matter proceed orderly. You may not be experienced, but we gentlemen are bound to be. Here are two seconds of mine!"

The friends looked askant at each other. A duel to the death, when the victor would be hanged, perhaps threw sharp responsibility on the abettors. But Captain Gasse and Villac, also in the army, felt that they must not wince.

The marquis took them by the hand, as they thus stood foremost.

"You see here the Count of Gasse, about whom no one can see a flaw! This is the Vidame of Villac, champion of the Sisters of the Catharine's Wheel; he belongs to the house of La Feuillade, of which the Marquis of Au-

busson is head. Now for your declaration! Are you a noble?"

"What does it matter—under this?" said Didier, touching the fatal proclamation with his hand. "I am a nameless foundling; but I have blood to spill in exchange for yours!"

"That you should be willing to fight is nothing, sir," returned Saverny. "But a foundling—that is another matter. You may be offspring of a noble, and it is a greater evil to degrade the son of a lord than ennoble a vassal. I will cross swords with you."

This settled, the seconds would have little trouble to arrange the encounter.

Didier said that he was ready at once, which made the bystanders cry that he was not usurping the pretensions to a high origin.

"He has not a sword," remarked Gasse.

He was not alone in finding relief at any prospect of a delay, when Saverny and this ardent stranger might cool down.

Langely came up to the group in debate and solemnly tendered his sword to Didier, who had laid aside his own since so closely attending Marion that a conflict had seemed impossible.

"Take a fool's sword," said he in his voice which wavered between jest and earnest. "To commit a folly, it is just the thing." And as the young man hesitated, he continued: "It is to be relied on, being better tempered than its master! You are a brave fellow and will do it honor!" Then, changing his tone to his habitual sneer, he concluded: "In exchange, bequeath me a bit of the rope they hang you with, as it brings the wearer good luck, you know!"

"Willingly," replied Didier, bitterly, as he took and tried the sword.

Convinced that he had, indeed, a good blade, he turned to the marquis, who felt a vague impression that they were not strangers, and said in a clear voice:

"Heaven be merciful to the deserving!"

Brichanteau clapped his hands, like a school-boy, and exclaimed joyously:

"It will be a handsome encounter, and that is delightful!"

"Where do we stand?" inquired Saverny.

"Under the lantern," rejoined Brichanteau. Villac shook his head.

"You must be out of your wits," protested Gasse; "you cannot see with the shadow of your own person! You will scratch out one another's eyes instead of piercing a limb."

"It will be light enough for bloodshed!" said Didier morosely.

"Well said," cried Saverny.

"The swords should send out sparks enough to light up the field," went on Didier as Langelly also was about to interfere.

The two combatants threw down their cloaks and hats after having saluted each other. Didier held the borrowed sword in hand; the marquis drew his. They fell on guard by the post.

"Waiting for you, sir!" said the noble.

"Not long! I am ready!" was the reply.

The seconds kept silent. In the stillness the steel was heard grating and clicking, while the fencers seemed to mark time with their feet, which nearly touched.

This time, Didier had another antagonist altogether than a Malargue; that was a brute who only sought to win at any hasard. But

the aristocratic gentleman would have felt dishonored if he did not kill his opponent according to the etiquette of the fencing-schools. Swordsmanship being a main chapter in a nobleman's book of training, Saverny, for though he was, gave a good portion of his time regularly to its practice. It followed that Didier made little headway, spite of his impatience and resentment against his contender. The courtiers shared the feelings of their champion, regarding the agile leaps out of reach, the shifting of footing, the well-parried thrusts and lunges, all as part of a game. It was to the fighting in which Didier had figured at Blois, what angling is to fishing.

As the bystanders applauded in a suppressed voice, encouraging the combat, and Didier boiled over with rage at the prolixity, what he dreaded came to pass.

Marion, left alone by her lover, had opened the window after a while to look at the stars, when the clink of weapons and the two men under the lantern light, with the surrounding spectators, naturally drew her attention downwards. She was not a minute recognising Didier at sword-point with the marquis. She conjectured that they had met and that her beloved had seized the opportunity to punish the gallant for intruding on her presence.

She sprang up, drew a mantle about her and ran down the stairs. At the foot she overturned the head waiter, who was peeping out at the door, held ajar, instead of going up to his couch.

At the instant of her appearance, Saverny had received a slight wound in the sword-arm; he retaliated by a well-launched thrust which threatened to transpierce his opponent. But

that was the nick when Marion dashed out of the doorway. Seeing—apparently—that Didier would be stricken to the heart, she flung her cloak upon the sword, which diverted the line, and uttered a piercing scream.

"Stop! Didier! God be good!"

But the two shook off the mantle, and returned to the charge, both recognising the intervener and emboldened by her presence.

But in the quiet that scream resounded far. Down the street the steel heads of the archers' halberds shone as a patrol of the watch came out from under the arches of St. Nicholas, and Bouchavannes, having his sword drawn to knock aside foul blows, beat down his friend's blade.

"All is lost! Here comes the watch!"

A red glow burst forth above the steel points. The archer beside the captain of the squad had revived a torch by swinging it in the air after beating its head against a horse-block.

The soldiers must have distinctly seen the two men crossing swords, for they came on apace. They had the new edict on their mind. Blois piqued itself to act upon it before Paris did.

"You cannot run," whispered Brichanteau. "Pretend to be wounded to the death!"

The marquis had to acknowledge that this advice could not be improved upon. He dropped as though shot, and Brichanteau half-enveloped him with the mantle which Marion had thrown into the arena with the effect of a red flag on a bull.

The noble uttered a very genuine groan of pain, for the stones were hard, and he had executed the mock fall with that conscientious-

ness which makes a good actor black and blue under the similar circumstances.

Didier glanced toward the noble and paused, indecisive, under the belief that he had slain his opponent.

Running up at the head of his men, though hampered by his spurs, insignia of knighthood, for he never rode a horse within the city walls, the Ward-and-Watch Captain shouted:

"Hold, in the King's name!"

"You had better save the marquis!" said Count Gasse, careless about what military discipline enjoined upon him. "He is a dead man, if they take him!"

"Stop, gentlemen!" cried the captain, as the seconds surrounded Saverny, in so stern a voice that they checked the disposition to lift him up. "This is going too far for a joke! Odsbodkins! They choose, to fight a duel, the very light that showed our proclamation against hostile encounters under penalty of death by hanging! The impudence! But I see they are the Parisians! I might be sure that our good Bloisians would not act so scandalously."

Still Didier stood irresolute; Marion's intervention had unmanned him, for jealousy suggested that she had rushed between rather to shield the marquis from punishment than on behalf of himself.

"Surrender," said the watch-officer, thinking he meant resistance and holding out his left hand for his sword. "Give up your rapier!"

"Stay!" said Langely drily, taking the sword from Didier's hand with a strong wresting motion; "it is my blade! If you really want it, apply to the King, whose jester I am."

The captain ordered his men to seize Didier

and went over to the spot where Saverny was stretched out, unmoving, partly under a table and partly shrouded in the mantle. His eyes were opened but they seemed without a spark of intelligence. Langely might have said that this trait was not remarkable in a court gallant, but the captain thought that the man was dead.

"Who was this?" asked he, bending down.

"This was Nazaire," said Brichanteau, entering into the spirit of the deception with avidity, "Marquis of Saverny, whose uncle is the Marquis of Nangis. He is a royal page."

"He is dead," said Gasse, with the air of one who had seen many mortal wounds.

"This is Captain Gasse, come to join your garrison," added Villac; "you can take his word for it. He is a veteran of the Italian frontier wars, though yet a young man."

"Dead, is he?" repeated the captain; "that is so much the better; it will save those law fellows from writing out a charge as long as my arm against him. He has died handsomely, which is more than can be said of what will befall the other! Ugh! Hanging! Ah, it will be a great day for Blois to see a gentleman hanged, like a deer-stealer!"

Pushed aside and jostled by the gentlemen and the archers, Marion had witnessed the hurried proceedings with a wondering eye. She had not half comprehended the solemnity of the occasion, for she knew that, heretofore, duels were as common among young men as sarabbands. But she was frightened now on hearing that Saverny was dead, by her lover's hand, spite of her intermediation. She perhaps had saved Didier by her flinging the cloak on the blades, but for what?

The captain of the archers seemed to think the marquis' death was enviable!

The landlord of the inn, with his waiters, most of them wearing nightcaps as showing that they had not had a hand in the unlawful meeting, crowded the doors and windows. They looked on with awe as the marquis' friends lifted him up and carried him away in Marion's mantle, laid on a rude litter improvised of the top of a table which they kicked to pieces, without asking the host's leave.

Marion tried to approach Didier, but he was surrounded three-deep by the archers, who had a high idea of their capture since he was the slayer of a marquis and the elect for the halter.

"Farewell, Marie!" said he, over their heads and between their halberds, "farewell, and forget me!"

CHAPTER XV.

BLACK AND GREY.

Petrified by terror, all the more deep as it was as yet incomprehensible, Marion Delorme, repulsed by the rear file of the watch, fell in a swoon in a chair by the table where Langely coolly finished his glass, still warm, of honeyed drink. He knew her well and stayed by her, therefore. The host and his assistants remained indoors, fearful of compromising themselves by succoring the companion of a rash-brained youth who contravened so deadly a mandate.

"Why did Didier say farewell in that lamentable voice of despair," murmured she, reviving in the cold night wind off the river, and she looked around. The red flare of the torch was dying away in the direction of the Castle. "Why did he bid me forget him?"

No one but the tall man in black velvet was on the open space. All was in glaring contrast to its animation after the banquet and even during the silent duel.

"Sir," said she, almost fearing that this grave person was a phantom, "what has that young man done, and what are they going to do with him?"

Langely took her by the hand, and she felt his trembled in hers—whether because she was icy cold or out of compassion. He caused her to rise and totter, upheld by his grip, to the post where he said: "Read!"

Though scarcely in her senses, she ran her sight over the paper and comprehended that death awaited duellists.

"Just heavens!" she exclaimed, snatching away her hand and clasping it with the other. "They have taken him hence, therefore, to do him to death!"

Langely nodded.

"They were fighting, yet it might have ended without any one knowing but for my coming between and rousing the town—bringing the watch by my calls! I was calling for help, sir," she went on piteously, "because I feared that he might be killed—whose life is dearer to me than my own!"—

"Saverny, Marion?" girded Langely.

"Oh, I know you—by your biting voice! You are the royal merrymaker!"

"I am Langely, at your orders, fair Marion!"

"No. It is the other, Didier, that I love! Not one of these tears are for the beau whom he slew! For he slew that annoying fop, did he not?"

"The marquis' friends bore him hence as one dead, certainly," rejoined the jester, evasively.

"What's his life? A butterfly's! Pinned to a tree by an idle schoolboy! But Didier, noble, intelligent, brave—oh! that his breath should be stopped by a halter! Never! To think that I summoned death out of the netherworld by my screams! Impossible! But since when is a duel, crossing of swords in the hands of men accustomed to them as women to the broidering-bodkin or the distaff! since when is duelling a crime?"

"Our Minister lost a dearly beloved brother by the duelling sword, they say, and so he hates the hasty argument of steel."

"Will they try him? Will they doom him?"

"My dear Marion, they will try him! The lawyers will never lose the opportunity to inaugurate the action of the new command when one of the victims was a marquis!"

"Where did they take him?"

"To prison."

"But the cage in these country towns—the warders—with money?" stammered Marion, too hurried in her ideas to express them consecutively and in full.

"Well, I daresay one could extricate a prisoner from the guardhouse, but this is a special prisoner, taken in infringement of the royal decree! They will lodge him in the Castle!"

"Well, people escape from castles!" said Marion with a return of hope.

She had seen nobles return to the world who had, like Bassompierre or Beaufort, hydra-heads of rebellion, obtained release from even the Bastile.

"You do not know Blois Castle," returned Langely, with pity. "Like that of Nantes, one may say that they who built it wanted a strong shell outside their consciences!"

Marion was not listening.

She blamed herself for all; but for her linking herself with this youth, whose life was previously unspotted with blood, he would not be imprisoned for the crime.

"It is because of my faults," she muttered. "Heaven is striking me, through him. Poor Didier! Langely, just think that I esteem nothing too good or sweet for that young man, and they award him the dungeon and the scaffold! Perhaps they will torture him, for has he not slain a noble?"

"Unless he confesses he was wrong to cross

the royal word, I doubt not they will put him to the torture!"

"I will go back to Paris—I will appeal to the King!"

"He has a right royal heart, my master!" said Langely. "But read!" and he rapped the paper which gave a funereal sound like the dry wing of a bat.

"His right to pardon is waived?" said Marion despairingly.

"Yes; still you might see him."

"Will you present me?"

"Willingly, poor child! But I cannot introduce you to the Cardinal."

"No? And then—"

"The Cardinal countersigned that edict. It is a capital offence, and those who offend must roll down the fatal declivity."

"Horrible," said she, shuddering. "You fill me with the chill of the grave! Away! I want nothing of you all! I am vile, infamous, shameful! But all that a woman can do shall be done for him in tribulation!"

Langely watched her depart, with an unsteady step, in the direction whither Didier had been led, and putting up his sword, the instrument of so much distress, said to himself:

"Life is a jest! But never, in my rare, gay moments, did I imagine that Marion Delorme, the courted of her sex, would implore the royal buffoon for the life of man! She who has had so many break their hearts, empty their purses and besmirch their names for hopeless love of her."

He looked after the form in white, unmantled, wending its tottering way toward the vast Castle, of which the high walls had been witness of so many memorable events.

"A white ant that ventures against a granite rock!" commented he. "Whom does she venture so much for? 'Didier.' A name of no sense. But an uncommon man! Brave as my sword, which I shall treasure for his having wielded it. Whom did he look like as he stood up against the flippant Saverny? He wore a royal air—such innate nobility as his cannot be hidden under the bushel of 'Didier.'"

"What name do you utter, my good friend Langely?"

The jester started. Without any sound a man had come round the post and stood next him. He was attired in a grey robe.

"Brother Joseph?" exclaimed the jester, with a reverence so low as not to be accorded to higher dignitaries of the realm.

"What did you say about Didier—a young man of Blois, whose acquaintance you only could have made by accident?"

The royal jester had to be keen-sighted, since one who jokes at all the world must make enemies. He had long ago judged the Cardinal's right hand man correctly. To him Joseph was not a hypocrite in religion, a canting politician or a kind of ogre.

He perceived that his attachment to his master, to the kingdom and to religion was sincere.

What the jester liked in him most was his intrepid spirit, of which few of the court intriguers possessed the like.

He had already come to the conclusion that Didier was the son of some exalted personage, and this interest of the Confessor of the Prime Minister confirmed his view.

He answered, with a softening of his voice, so that Joseph could understand all that hap-

pened before the Horn of St. Hubert since the banquet.

"Saverny has been persecuting Marion?" said the Capuchin, summing up. "He followed her here, and seeing that she had made the acquaintance of this Didier, picked a quarrel with him, although Didier had saved his life? It is fortunate for the shallow-pate that he was slain!"

"What warmth!" thought Langely. "To be sure, Saverny is no great friend of mine, but I am not going to deliver him to this tiger in grey, by revealing that I think his fall and death a sham! Let us dry Marion's tears, for I am badly out in my forecast unless the Capuchin can shield Didier better with his gown than Marion with her mantle!"

He went on to relate that the watch had come and, while permitting the marquis' friends to carry away his lifeless body, had borne the other antagonist to the Castle as a royal prisoner.

"Marion has followed, eh?" said Joseph. "Do you think that, at length, she is capable of a true passion?"

"She loves this man," replied the jester simply. "Who saves her adorer will make her his debtor for life. And Marion, in these times of plot and marplot, is not to be scoffed at!"

The Capuchin did not remark on this suggestion, but abruptly said:

"Langely, you lent this young man your sword, did you? Ah, listen to what I say: It may be that your sword will stand you in better stead with the Cardinal for its loan than your bauble with the King!"

With this enigmatical sentence the monk

took the road travelled by Didier under escort, and by his mourning flame.

"Mischief on these plotters and planners, with their oracular riddles," muttered the jester, fingering his swordhilt nervously. "They spoil one's digestion and they torment the brain. I shall die a Cardinalist, I prophesy, though most of my life a King's man when, the saints know, few are the King's men, and inconstant they! Let me see: There has been a favorite for each of my bells! He took a fancy for his coachdriver, his trainer of the hounds, Luynes because he taught him hawking, Bautru because he carried him on his back over a puddle in the Tuileries gardens—and all cost him a pretty penny. I cost him nothing, for my salary is always behindhand. They tried to amuse him, not being fools! And I, seeing that he will always be a morose king, keep him low-tuned! You will see that I will be his favorite to the death! That is why the Cardinal, through Brother Joseph, seeks to suborn me! I think that I have done the best night's work of them all by helping this Didier to teach Master Saverny a lesson! Only, is he a protégé of Joseph or Armand? This is to be ascertained."

But he seemed to bear enough on his brain at the moment. He was going to a room he had prudently retained at the Barleycorn Hostelry, when an old woman accosted him.

"Pray you, sir," said she whiningly, "were you not among those Parisian gentlemen who dined at the Hubert's Horn?"

The jester nodded and disengaged his cloak from her thin, wiry fingers.

"Then you would know Mademoiselle Marion?"

"Marion Delorme?" said he surprised. "Certainly, I know Mademoiselle Marion! Who does not?"

"Is she stopping at the Horn?"

Langely reflected.

"Why do you inquire about her?" said he guardedly.

"Because I was her woman, and she left, in a hurried departure from her old quarters by Old Street, a casket of jewelry which I believe she will not be sorry to see again."

"You pursue her to restore jewelry? Ye stars and planets! look down on this duenna who does not lay up her mistress's valuables for her own old age! My pretty one," continued he, "if you will follow your nose as it points, to-wit, downwards, you will arrive at the Castle. Mademoiselle Marion is at its gates, trying to coax the governor to admit her to see her gallant, locked up there."

"Master Didier locked up?"

"Have you not heard that he has been fighting a duel, contrary to the express command of the King, countersigned by the Cardinal?"

"I heard that there was a great to-do at the inn, but—why do you stare so! If I were a young woman, sir—"

"Oh, you remind me—who the deuce do you remind me of? But, no matter! The Witch of Endor, I suppose," he added to himself as Rose, for it was she, hurried toward the point indicated. "Ever since I consulted that sorceress of the Blanchapelle Lane, witches have been my dreams. This old hag—whom does she look like!"

At the door he paused, clapped his hand to his forehead and said, as he went up the stairs in the dark:

"Laffemas! the Cardinal's protégé! Laffemas, Master of Requests! Lieutenant-Criminal! Secretary to the Council in another week, mayhap. Could she be his grandam? Ah, all these rogues have a family likeness. For Laffemas is a rogue! and I doubt I did Marion a good turn by directing this harridan to where she weeps! All is one, in the end! Of them all, I think I shall sleep the soundest!"

Indeed, in ten minutes he was snoring like an old boar in his wallow.

In the meantime the Capuchin had reached the princely fortalice in whose records feasts, tournaments, marriages and crimes of the high and mighty were mingled.

Marion was in the shadow, weeping, as Langely had conjectured, like Valentina of Milan deploring there for her husband assassinated by the Duke of Burgundy, or Isabel of Bavaria bewailing the loss of her Chevalier Bois-Bourdon.

Her historical reading was superficial, but she had heard, from those almost the contemporaries, of the Duke of Guise butchered by the orders of Henry the III. That gory memory made her shudder.

She had been warned off by the sentinel who, by order, blew the flame of his arquebuss match, and threatened to shoot if she approached the gate.

She retired into a natural niche where the crumbling stone had fallen out, and continued her profound sorrowing.

At this time, how far from possible realisation was the prophecy of the witch of Paris, that she was destined to be happy with the unfortunate young man whose love for her had

led to his incarceration within that gloomy edifice?

Joseph easily discovered her, but the appearance of Dame Rose, an unwonted apparition after dark in the city, caused him to draw back. A pile of stone and wood for reparation afforded him a shelter and the old woman passed him, unconscious of a third person at this odd interview.

"Dame Rose!" said Marion when the woman's skinny finger was laid on her arm.

"Rose?" muttered the monk. "This is her old servant in her former lodgings. What fidelity! to come out on her aged feet after the curfew! There are still faithful servants, then!"

Faithful or not, Rose did not say a word about the mislaying of jewels which she had pretended to Langely, prompted her to follow her mistress.

"I heard that there was a duel fought under the windows of the Hubert, and that the guards took hither the survivor of the affair. Who is it, mistress? The splendid gallant from Paris, or the moody youth of Blois?"

"Didier is in there," replied Marion with an effort to be calm. "Rose, you are no innocent, and you have attained a ripe age. How may one, with money and influence, obtain an interview with a prisoner! or at least convey him a letter of cheer?"

Rose meditated. At least, here was a chance of transferring still more to her store from Marion's.

"Oh, I have a long acquaintance with Blois," returned she, in a cheery voice. "I must know, to speak with, several of the prison warders."

"Ah!" said Marion, in a sanguine tone.

"Write the note you spoke of, and I will undertake to pass it inside there, spite of the sentinel and his smoking firearm!"

"I dislike leaving the gate where he went in," said the mourner, "but where can I go to write, at this hour?"

"I went to my own cottage, after you freed me of your service," said the old woman. "It is not far, though without the walls. Have no fear; nothing will be done till daylight, and I think that, as he has transgressed a royal edict, they will send down judges from Paris. All this takes time," said she judiciously, "and with time, and money, which, you say, you have, much may be done."

"Good! you restore me hope, my good Rose," cried Marion, taking her by the hand. "To your cottage! If only I can send him a few lines during the day!"

"You will be remarked in your white dress," said the woman; "take my overskirt which is black, and throw it over your shoulders for a cloak. Pray heaven that we do not meet any prowlers, though, heaven wot! they are quiet since your brave young gentleman gave them a thrashing and broke their captain's neck. La! How deceiving these quiet young men are! To think that he killed a valorous robber and this evening, struck down a noble of the court without more ceremony than a glutton wrings the neck of a prawn!"

The monk had seen and heard all this. He followed the pair stealthily but it was so lonely without the walls that he could not fail to be seen by the sharp-eyed Rose, however inattentive was her companion.

"That is my house," said the woman. "Go right on to it, and open the latch. I will rejoin

you instantly. I wish to see that you are not dogged by this shadow of grey, creeping like a monstrous mole in our rear."

While Marion obeyed, too sorrowful to act otherwise than mechanically, but a little alleviated by this semblance of a friend—one who had seen Didier and could talk about him, at least! the brave old woman resolutely returned in her road.

But the Capuchin had time to execute a slight change in his apparel. He did it in the cover of a pile of ruins, a bastion demolished under the royal decree concerning useless forts. He had simply turned his grey frock insideout and he appeared now as a black friar, or Dominican, to the puzzled eyes of Rose.

It was he took the lead in challenging.

"Who are you, citizen or stranger, and what are you doing at this hour under the walls?"

Rose stammered, woman-like, questioningly:

"I am an old citizen, and I ought to know you? Who are you, reverend father?"

"Ah, a devout woman?" said he less sternly.

"I was afraid that I had fallen among robbers, especially as you had a young woman with you, and robbers employ such as decoys. But you would not intend harm to one of my cloth, particularly as I have been without the walls on an errand of mercy. One of the robbers who waylaid the Marquis of Saverny, not so many nights ago that it can have slipped the recollection of 'an old citizen,' was lodged in the Castle. He is dying of a wound received in the affray from a gentleman named Didier. It appears that this rogue, a play-actor in his less dishonest path," continued the garrulous friar with an ill-disguised sneer, "cut the purse of Master Didier during the affray. I would

not receive his confession, you understand, while he held the wages of crime; and so he gave me the purse, barring what the warders squeezed out, to be returned to this Didier, whose pardon he entreats."

"The prison? Are you attached to the Castle prison?" queried Rose, fixing her eyes on the speaker.

Notwithstanding the twilight, not so dark along the river, both studied each other, and came to accurate conclusions.

"This is a sharp priest!" said the woman.

"This is a deep villain," said the monk.

"Since this evening, only," glibly returned the latter. "I came down by the carrier's wagon; you would not have me travel post haste, would you, sworn to poverty as I am? I might have travelled in better style," he added, sighing, as if not altogether cut off from mundane luxuries, "if I had agreed to say I was chaplain to Captain the Count de Gasse, who comes here to join the garrison, but I could not repeat such a falsehood!"

Rose sighed and nodded sympathetically.

"Besides, in the wagon, pillowed on straw, it was perhaps as comfortable as using the chaise, for the captain would have kept it on the gallop, like he does his horse."

"So you are attached to the prison?" repeated the old woman, obstinately.

"My duties commence to-morrow. I am vicar to the chaplain. But I am happy to say," he went on self-sufficiently, "that when they pension off the present incumbent—"

"Father Eusebius?"

"That is it. I am sure of the office, for I, look you, good woman, am the appointee of the new Master of the Court of Requests—"

"M. Laffemas, your friend?" cried Rose with animation.

"My friend! why, I am his instructor in politics! Thanks to Father Luc, his 'good-luck,' he, he! He has risen rapidly! No longer will they call him 'the Cardinal's Headsman,' as they say Father Joseph is his 'Headman'—another jest of mine! he, he! At the next promotion given him, I will be chaplain to the castle, you will see!"

While he was rubbing his hands in almost childish glee, Rose muttered:

"A protégé of my grandson's! Good, good! It is a fine thing to have a friend in the prison! All is going well!"

Beaming with satisfaction, she gave a faint chuckle and said, aloud:

"Father Luc, you are in the way to fill up your alms-purse, and do a kindness to a lady who, I have grounds for believing, is looked upon with favor at the court."

"Here, at Blois?" said the pretended Dominican with surprise.

"If she is here, it is because she is conceiving some plan in support of Prince Gaston's intentions. Yesterday, a party of his adherents were over at Chambord, under cloak of killing off the superfluous bucks."

"Ha!" said the self-appointed prison-chaplain quickly. "And they were on hand to welcome Count Gasse on his coming to enter upon his garrison duties. This looks like a budding conspiracy, forsooth!"

"Well, be that as it may, this is the point. This lady, from Paris, has a gallant in this town whom she is seeking to shape as a helper in the scheme. His name, which you have mentioned first, is Didier—"

"Didier plotting for Prince Gaston—"

"Who wants his brother Louis removed from the throne, divorced by death, so that he may marry his Queen—"

"Abominable treason," exclaimed the priest. "You are a good woman who will not go unrewarded. Let me haste and advise Master Laffemas!"

"Wait, wait—this Didier is already caged; he is in the Castle prison—"

"He is there?" and the friar pointed. "No doubt, no doubt!"

"Just so, for infringing the fresh-issued royal edict forbidding duelling under pain of death, and death by hanging at that!"

"I know," said Joseph, with a know-all air, "there are no secrets to my master Laffemas!"

"Didier, having killed his antagonist, the Marquis of Saverny, has only to await examination. The order for execution must follow."

"It preceded it," said the other. "The Edict instructs the judges."

"But there is often good pickings on a doomed man!" said Rose drily. "This fine lady wishes to correspond with him; and it is understood, even to you churchmen who know so little of the world, he, he!" chuckled the old woman again, "that the post between the imprisoned and their friends outdoors pays a heavier charge than his Majesty's mails."

The friar laughed.

"Since he is a ward of mine, this Didier, I can see him as often as I please. If this is clear, you have only to hand me any communication for him, and stick a gold piece on the wax, to be sure of a reply. All you get above the gold, keep, Dame Rose, while I keep all the postage the gentleman may pay."

"You can manage that the more readily," observed the hag, "as you are his purse-bearer!"

Both laughed. Seldom had either passed a merrier quarter of an hour.

Then Rose recollected her mistress, no doubt in tribulation at being so abruptly abandoned by her recovered friend and servant.

"Wait here for the letter," said she. "Be careful, and—who knows? There may be a great reward for us if we baffle the plot."

"Baffle a plot! That is the business of M. Laffemas," said the grey monk who had become a black friar without any ceremony. "We will be enriched for life and he—he will displace M. d'Argenson as Lieutenant-Criminal, take my word for it!"

He wrapped his gown round him, for the breeze came more chillily off the river, laid his head and shoulders against a tree stump, razed at man's height not to interfere with the line of fire of a culverin on the Castle, and resigned himself to await Rose's return.

"A consummate villain," he mused in the interval. "But I must wait to be sure before I act on this trace. There is a likeness between her and Laffemas in voice, traits, and gestures, which would delight Dr. Letellier, the royal physician, who preaches upon hereditary marks being indelible and everduring. If Laffemas is son of hers, or yet a grandson, then I can break forever the hold which he keeps over the Cardinal."

CHAPTER XVI.

OF THE GOOD GUARD OVER HIS MAJESTY'S
MAILS.

Letters were veritable compositions in those days, although Marion stood upon no forms in addressing her lover in jeopardy. But Rose had a missive of her own to indite and this took her more time. In fact, she spoiled several sheets of paper, though a valuable commodity, before she had completed one to her mind. She put the spoilt paper on a fire of a few sticks which she had kindled on the cold hearth after lighting the two-branched candlestick by which they had done their writing. Marion held out her open hand to her, with coin and a ring on it.

"Take what you deem sufficient," said she; "and pawn the ring as soon as a goldsmith and moneylender's is open in the day. We must not stint, with M. Didier in peril!"

Rose cleared the palm and rapidly left the cottage, bidding Marion make herself at home. She had not breathed a word about her having already found the messenger.

The Capuchin-Dominican was still at the spot. He took the golden louis, tested it mechanically between his teeth as most persons did the dubious coin of that day, and took the note which Rose confided to him.

"Be sure that it falls into the right hands," said she hypocritically. "It was written with

tears. Never have I seen such pearls from such diamond eyes!"

"Is not that another letter you have in your tucker?" said the monk, who must have had good eyes, for the darkness had deepened.

"Yes," said Rose; "it is for the post. I am writing to a cousin at Grenoble, who thought of coming to my cottage to rent it. But I must harbor that court lady there, d'ye see, so that, in case she must be arrested, we may have the honor of leading the guards to her."

"The honor!" echoed Joseph, laughing. "By my patron-saint! the royal jester is a dolt compared to the old ladies of Blois!"

He said nothing more about letters, but stepped off toward the Castle as if eager to be there to await the gate-opening.

Convinced that she had secured a faithful ally, Rose went to the posting-house of the Hubert's Horn and, finding an ostler at the stables, getting ready a horse for an early riser, she induced him for a silvery consideration to accompany her within the house where she deposited the letter of her own concoction in a box for the purpose.

"It will not be franked till morning," explained the ostler, "but I will see master and pay him whatever it is charged out of the pistole you give me."

"I make it two," said Rose, "since you are sure it will go."

"I wish I were as sure of becoming head stableman here."

"Why not?" said Rose pleasantly. "You are a sharp and obliging fellow, like all Picards."

"But the head-stableman is a Picard, too," returned the ostler with a grimace.

In the meantime the Capuchin had proceeded

straight to the Castle gates, where he gave the proper password to the sentinel and also intimated that he wanted speech with the captain of the gate.

This was all in the line of the guard's duty so he pointed with his arquebuss-butt that the speaker might go on under the frowning archway.

In a room in the hollow abutment half-a-dozen soldiers were nodding as they sat on a long bench; two were sleepily throwing dice on a drumhead, and two more were smoking. The sergeant sat at a desk and seemed racking his brain over a book, exhibiting varied and hopeless caligraphy to drive a reader of palimpsests frantic.

At the appearance of a priest where they had expected to see a superior officer at the least, their awakened countenances expressed disgust.

The Capuchin, still a Dominican, went over to the sub-officer at the desk and said familiarly:

"The cream of the morning to you, Sergeant La Bellune, and a pleasant time at Blois!"

"Father Jo—" stammered the man, dropping his quill which, overladen with ink, inflicted another blot among the many giving the page the appearance of being the target for a discharge of a blunderbuss.

"Hush! I knew you were down here, preceding your captain by a few days to smooth the way for him! Come, come, do not look glum. Blois is not the Markets Quarter of Paris; but all the saints take not the sunny side of the great avenue in Paradise, and with so many of your comrades here you ought to feel at home."

"What can I do for your Emi—that is, Reverence?" said the old soldier, evidently undesirous of carrying on a dialogue and checked every now and then in what might be a disagreeable revelation by a blink of the ecclesiastical's eyes.

"Take me to the night warder and let him show me the prisoner Didier's cell."

"A royal prisoner," said the sergeant who had risen with alacrity to oblige but now seemed inclined to drop back into his leather-bottomed stool again.

"By order of You-know-whom!" said the monk, suddenly slipping a ring upon his finger which had hung among his beads on its string.

Shaking his finger a little, this ring's stone rattled peculiarly, being a stone loose within a stone, what the ancients called an eagle-stone, with the belief that it contained a magical power, especially when in a ruler's possession. This rarity was known to be Richelieu's, one that he seldom trusted out of sight, though Father Joseph was another self.

Disrespecting the guardroom diary's parchment, he stamped the ringhead upon its face, right on the ink blot, carried the wet bezel to another place less unclean and imprinted the arms of Richelieu thereon.

It was not chance, but just over this mark was the line, pure phrase of form in a charge, "By order of the King." The sergeant regarded them as invisibly coupled, and bowed as if the two rulers of France stood before him.

Rising again, he said:

"Corporal Longuépée, take my place and see if you can make head or tail of this file of Dutch herrings stood on end—but which my

foregoer calls figures of an account! I give my soul to all the imps if I can understand it! Come, reverence!" he continued.

No sooner had the two left the smoky guard-room by an inner door, than one of the old garrison asked, turning to his new comrade, for the fort had received a reinforcement of Parisians:

"Who is this black monk to whom the sergeant is so civil, he who is, between us, an English bulldog for politeness?"

"That black friar is a grey monk—"

"A Franciscan?"

"Yes, a Capuchin! That is, his Grey Eminence!"

"The Shadow, so to say, of the Card—"

"Silence in the ranks," said an old soldier, sternly, and a silence followed, the country soldiers looking awe-stricken at the new draft, to whom the right-hand man of the Minister was known under even a turned coat.

In half-an-hour afterwards, Joseph came out and quitted the prison; very little was needed to have had the garrison, as represented by the night watch, salute him with royal honors for, in spite of the veteran's hush, the thoroughly awakened men had chatted of the Cardinal and Brother Joseph, with many a legend of the latter.

The Capuchin, having reversed his gown, reached the Hubert Inn as a man was mounting leisurely at the side gate.

He was clad in blue and wore the *fleur-de-lis* in silver on his velvet hunting-cap.

"Are you the courier of the post?" inquired the Capuchin.

"Yes, your reverence," was the careless answer. "Antoine-Louis, at your service."

"The Reverend Father Carré, with whom you once rode to Italy, tells me that you are a devoted man to the State—"

"Father Carré was good to my father when his barn was struck by lightning; I am devoted to Father Carré—"

"And to the King and State—"

"To the King, the State, the Cardinal and the rest of the Royal Family!" returned the man, joyously.

"Then you know this?" showing him in the ray of a lantern swinging at the stable gate, the ring which had convinced Sergeant La Bellune, and ringing it like a little bell.

"I know it, and I obey."

"Father Carré took you along with him as a pleasant travelling-companion?" queried the Capuchin.

"Not altogether that," replied the rider frankly and with conceit, "but I am a bit of a politician and he wanted to sound me on the policy of turning out the Jesuits."

"Indeed?" said the other, surprised.

"Yes; I ride over a good piece of the country; I chat with innkeepers and their servants, travellers, drovers, cottagers, with whom I stop when my horse casts a shoe or breaks a rein; so I was able to assure Father Carré that the Jesuits bore no good name except as excellent instructors of the youth; but as these youth were the sons of the county families, the people knew no good of them. If the Cardinal revenged himself for their writing pamphlets against him by ridding the kingdom of them by means of the Pope's mandate, why! the peasants would not shed blood for them, nor tears when they packed up."

"That is how you came to go all the way to Rome with him?"

"Faith, reverend father, to tell the truth as if I were at confession," said the man merrily and bravely, for he began to suspect that he was being tried, "I have to howl with the wolves after dark or I should be waylaid on the road when I carry the family jewels to Paris for resetting, for the daughter's marriage! I mean that I nurse the acquaintance of such illustrious highwaymen as Captain Malargue, *alias* the Flayer, who I hear is dead of a broken neck; another Captain—the playactor Lorient *alias* the Matamore, who is in prison down there, and others who would not be famous to your reverence. Therefore, having an inkling of this acquaintanceship, the worthy father engaged me, tacitly, to keep off these gentry who line the road to Rome!"

"You are a valuable man," said Joseph emphatically. "What is your ambition?"

The man did not hesitate. He felt that his hour to strike the iron was come and he should make the lucky horseshoe or maul the metal in vain.

"To marry the niece of Daddy Horion of the Hubert's Horn and succeed the old fellow, who is an excellent cook but no host. In short, with my savings, to show three hundred gold louis."

"Friend Antoine-Louis, you shall have five hundred, I pledge!"

"Order of the State?"

"Under the King's name, and by order of the Minister. Now, what is your route to Paris with the mailbag?"

"I do not go over the bridge, because my horse shies at the new planks in the footway,

and I strike in upon the highway at yonder young oakwood," he continued, pointing with his short-handled whip.

"That suffices. I will await you in that little wood."

"What the deuce does the Grey Eminence want to waylay the mail carrier for?" grumbled the courier; but he did not say a word about the interview on getting the bag from the host or when asked if all were right, on his being handed the traditional stirrup-cup.

In the oak grove the Capuchin was placidly waiting, seated on a mossy stone just off the track.

"Dismount and hand me the bag," said he.

Antoine-Louis obeyed more readily than he would the captain of a band of highwaymen, for he was brave, and without more than a slight convulsion of his features saw the monk, with quickness and dexterity, open the bag by passing a knife, heated in a diabolical invention of a pocket spirit-lamp, novel to the courier, through the massy wax seal and undo a knot to which Gordius' was simplicity.

He took out the letters by handfuls but stopped half-way, extricated one from the mass, opened it as skilfully as the bag, and perused it to himself.

"Heavens!" said he, without moving his lips, so that the mail-carrier might imagine it was done by an automaton with a wax face. "Rose is mother of this Laffemas! She is the woman who 'mothered' the poachers at Richelieu and to whom was confided Ramire! 'My son!' she calls him 'her son,' as plainly as the three letters can speak. Besides, she rejoices in his station, and in the degree I promised him! It is her son! And she begs him to hurry down

to Blois to see that Didier's execution is carried out. This love of Laffemas—this bloodthirsty desire to be rid of Didier—I need be no necromancer to divine the problem. Didier living is a menace to Laffemas, who is no progeny of the Cardinal! They made him believe that Ramire gave birth to a son, and that Laffemas is that child. Was there a child? And is Didier—? At all events, Didier must not die!"

The courier had calmly smoked a pipe while this transgression was going on. With the same peace he watched the Cardinal's agent restore the letters to the sack, and renew the sealing. He was letting the letter which he had read go with the rest so that there was no abstraction to complain of.

"This is for the needle and thread to repair the rent," said he, giving the man a gold piece. "Resume your journey; and, one of these days, when I stop at the Hubert, Father Joseph will expect to have the new host and his wife wait on him at his table."

"The best of the house, reverence! The cream, Emi—"

"'Sh! woods have leaves which some men can read, these days!"

"If I should be questioned about the delay—"

"Ply the whip and spur and make it up!"

"The opened bag?"

"It was by order of the King and for the welfare of the State!"

Joseph returned to the city.

The courier galloped off, muttering:

"For 'the State' read 'Richelieu!' It strikes me that I put my first step on the golden ladder when I rode to Rome with Old Father Carré!"

CHAPTER XVII.

NO HUNGER LIKE THAT FOR A PENSION.

After turning his "Joseph's coat" so as to present himself once more as a black friar, the Capuchin asked at the prison gates, this time, for the chaplain. His Dominican brother was in the sick ward. This was in the east turret, for isolation's sake. Joseph went to him and showed such proofs of his appointment to take his active duties that on his return to the prison, with the doctor called to see his patient's progress, and the governor, summoned to witness the transfer, he was placed as spiritual controller.

In company with the doctor and a turnkey, for opening the communicating doors, massively protected, he made the rounds of his new domain.

"This," said he, at one point, a grated window allowing a view of the Castle inner gardens, where princesses had promenaded in the halcyon days, "this is rather a parlor than a cell. A state prisoner—that is, a noble?"

The doctor laughed.

"It is a state prisoner, sure enough, but his nobility is in doubt. He is that young man, Didier, who slew the Marquis of Saverny in a duel, in the teeth of the decree against such practices. As he is doomed by that very Edict to death by strangulation, the governor kindly consigned him to the most agreeable place of sojourn for the few hours remaining him. We await advices from Paris."

"A duellist? And the door not guarded?" said the new chaplain surprisedly.

The warder jangled his bunch of keys, almost a cartload.

"Oh, he is no trouble. He is, on the contrary, so taciturn that I ordered his cravat to be taken away. He may meditate suicide!"

"I should like to see the moody young man," said Joseph.

"Certainly. Ranulphe, open the peeping-wicket."

The turnkey slid aside the small trap-door in the large one, and Joseph looked into the cell, comfortable as cells go, upon the young man in whom he had shown material interest when he fought with Malargue for the first time.

Didier heard the grating of the panel, but, save a slight shrug of the shoulders, continued looking out of the small window on the fig-trees in the garden, without curiosity, and with only that contempt being manifested.

"Morose, silent, scornful! Doctor, this is rather a patient than a prisoner! He is going melancholy mad!"

"Oh, if he is sickening into anything, it is the jail fever. We had a bad outbreak at the last assizes. A prisoner, the bandit who was a playactor and who was brought here, wounded after an affray in which that poor Saverny was maltreated, has a touch of it, and, I hear, the judges will not be sorry if a commission is sent down to take the special cases."

"I remember the fever of two years back," interposed the turnkey with an old functionary's familiarity; "the prisoners died like sheep and the city paid ten crowns per day for posies of medicinal herbs to be placed before the judges."

"It seems to me that a young swordsman may well look pale with nothing to gaze upon but a plot of *Mariets* and *Mari-golds*!" said the friar with an emphasis on the "Marie" in the names of the two flowers which he cited, making Didier start. One more obtuse might have taken the hint that here was a friend in the secret of his passion.

"Pale?" repeated the doctor, somewhat rudely displacing the monk to put his eye to the wicket. "Yes—no! decidedly he has a color! Hum! it would be an unpardonable fatality if he were carried away before the judge from Paris came to try his case—and impolite!"

"Unpardonable?" questioned Joseph.

"Yes, they would never forgive the prison doctor if he let the fever cheat the Executioner, especially when the Executioner is the Cardinal's own—"

"M. Laffemas?"

"An old enemy of mine! And I care not who hears it!"

The warder had prudently hurried up the passage.

"Will you finish the round to-day?" said the doctor, dully, as if regretting his frankness.

"Are there many yet to be seen?"

"Only the common herd! petty offenders! Except the playactor, who is amusing, as he frets and vociferates mouthfuls of the passing kind of tragedy."

"In a fever, too?" said the monk, with significance.

"Yes, he has a fever! He will drink, and he is wounded. If he had fought a duel, he might also cheat the headsman."

"I will see no more until after breaking my fast!"

"Not breakfasted? Come and have breakfast with me! I can promise you a feast! The new Captain Gasse, who is related to my own family, the Thémînes, kindly inaugurated his joining the garrison by sending me some venison, killed by his friends in the Forest, and a basket of wine. We are out of the warder's hearing—you are not an *Abstemist* Father?"

"This is actually the feastday of St. Dominick!" said Joseph with an air which might appear jolly to one who knew ecclesiasticals well.

"Good! you will be a favorite in this Castle!"

The doctor had a suite of pleasant rooms about which he narrated a story or two of the royal personages previously occupying it.

"This young old man is soured," said Joseph to himself. "He must have been disappointed in something."

They sat down to a copious dinner, rather than breakfast. The monk knew how to please the Breton, for such, without his revelation, by the round head, thick-set frame, jovial manners, and loud voice, he might have been guessed to be. He ate and drank heartily.

"Zookers!" cried the doctor in delight. "Worse companions than you have been cardinals! but what can you expect under a consumptive King and a Cardinal who thinks more of turning a verse than furthering the real sciences useful to man and the kingdom."

"I know something of the court," observed Joseph, gravely. "In time, I have seen many comments on the Minister revoked. Has he not established an Academy of the Arts and Sciences?"

"He ought to do more for medicine, an ailing

Minister of an ailing King, all of an ailing kingdom!"

"What do you personally complain of, dear host?" asked the Capuchin, slowly sipping the wine.

"That I cannot get any hearing for my plea. I have written no end of petitions, with proofs in support, which would fill our moat, showing that I am not ignorant of the Pest and its work. I say that it has its origin beyond Marseilles, where all researches stop, and I am willing, if my expenses are paid, to cross to Africa and go into that unknown world to seek the source of this deadly stream, the Plague."

"Let me see, as a Breton, you would be fond of voyages?" said Joseph drolly.

"Oh, I am not of the maritime districts. Well, I like travel, but I love science. Ensure me my outlay, with a position that will enable me to call on France in distress and danger to my mission, and I undertake to supply our physicians with means to combat the cruellest enemy of civilisation."

"I thought the great wars—"

"Wars of man, great? There are few warriors but who spare some creatures—but the Plague—plague on it! it sweeps away all, learned and loon, child and centenarian, statesman and petty clerk! Let the faculty but know how to cope with the great Pest and the minor disorders will be rooted out, by another century!"

"What answer did you get to your petitions?"

"Silence! the great wet-blanket by which inventors are smothered by jacks-in-office! Privately, I received a hint that I had best not fly over the underlings' heads—"

"I was just going to say, write to the Chief

of the State, that is to him next the Chief, since the King does little outside of his province—to Richelieu.”

“They tell me not to do so; for, twenty years ago, my brother killed his elder brother in a duel.”

“Thémines! ah, you would be that Thémines?” said Joseph. “But the great man has a noble heart. Did he not make your father Governor of Brittany?”

“Yes; the old gentleman thinks, to conciliate him; he is as obstinate as—as—a Breton.”

“Richelieu bears him, or you, no grudge. Hark ye, doctor, I have the ear of one of his confessors, Father Carré, of my own brotherhood. The Minister shall hear of you and your project. Father of Mercy! if the statesman can be so wroth with the duellists for depriving the State of subjects, how glad should he be towards one who, by crippling the Plague—”

“Throttling it!” said the doctor, holding up his glass.

“Would double the number of lives in the realm?”

“Tripling—what do I say—quintupling! I will prove this by the mortality tables!”

“Make up a packet of your treatises, and I will wrap round them a letter to Father Carré.”

“It was a blessed day when you were appointed to the Castle!” cried Doctor Thémines enthusiastically.

“You are good to say so. So you can combat the Plague?”

“Not yet! but I can make head against its minor manifestations—”

“As—”

"The *prodromae* fevers—the precursory fevers—"

"Jail-fever, with which that worthy turnkey was so engrossed that he forgot manners and discipline?"

"Jail-fever? to be sure. Now, that ambulatory Thespian, the Matamore—he has jail-fever. But if I were to tell the truth, there would be a panic in the Castle. Very likely the judge from Paris would not come."

"My friend, a judge who scents blood, always comes to his seat."

"Oh, you think they will send a hanging judge?"

"As surely as your patient Matamore has the jail-fever!"

"Which is, the Plague in a minor form."

"It follows that if the Matamore had a release, you would expedite his liberation that he might not infect the Castle?"

"I should like to study his case, but—"

"Since that would make a pest-house of the Castle, keep aloof the judge and his train, whose coming, to say nothing of the sight-seers brought hither, would enrich Blois, you sink yourself and let him go with his play-acting tribe. The plague is nothing new among vagrants and vagabonds, all know!"

"Who is likely to release that robber?"

"Judge Laffemas, of course—"

The doctor leant back in his chair. He laughed roughly.

"That tiger—that monster relent, sign an order of release?—My friend, you are misleading; you are not in touch with the court!"

"Laffemas will release this vagabond because he does not want to enter prisons where the jail-fever, otherwise Pest, is lurking."

"Good! I recant! the poor devil, who, all things considered, only tried to cut a purse and a throat, will go along with his dramatic friends, infecting them, perhaps—"

"Perhaps be cured by the open-air life! You know we monks are Peripatetics? are we ill? 'Let him take a walk!' says the abbot! It is true that our curative walks sometimes extend into Asia or Canada; but we are cured!"

"If a release order comes for Master Matamore, depend on my facilitating his departure."

"And I! all the more as, between ourselves, the encouragement of even itinerant players is no harm in one who seeks a favor of the ruling powers."

"Does the sullen, apathetic King favor the drama? I thought his ideas rose no higher than the ballet! is not *La Mermaison* his pet amusement on the stage?"

"The King does incline to dancers," said Joseph gravely, holding out his glass for more wine, having successfully emptied the other under the table; "but I was speaking of the Cardinal."

"Yes, he writes tragedies!"

"And is drumming up France for actors! Mark, you recommend yourself by assisting, in the retention on the great stage of Life, of even one actor. This humble Matamore may be the 'villain' he requires for his piece!"

"I would open the door to Matamore with my own hand!" cried the Breton, rising.

"Wait! Meanwhile, study the map of Africa; you shall trace the Pest to its place of genesis! the petition, the proofs—"

With unsteady foot the Breton crossed the room, and with unsteady hand took some papers out of a press in the solid wall.

"Here they are: a spare petition, which only requires my hand—"

He filled in the blank with wine lees instead of ink.

"These are tractates in support—stay—this is one anent Suicide—"

"Let me—ah! what a superior thesist you are! what lucidity and compactness! if only that young gentleman doomed for duelling were to read this, I am sure he would renounce the thought of self-murder which is in his eye, and meet the noose with resignation."

"Give it to him, as you go down! give it him—"

"Will it not look odd, a chaplain so new in his office, transmitting papers to a prisoner—"

"Not a jot! but—stay!" added he with a bright gleam and laughing at his own brilliancy; "it will look more professional if we send it round a potion as a double dose. Moral and Corporeal, so all medicines should be!"

He spilt some powder out of a jar upon the pamphlet, folded the latter up deftly, tied it and sealed it, and said, as he handed it, with the other papers, to his new friend:

"That to the morose prisoner! the ginger will enliven him and the tract fortify him! that young man will tread the scaffold as in a dancing measure!"

"And we will clear the prison of that pestilential tragedian?"

"It is understood. I wish I could see you down the stairs. But those confounded spiral stairs! the wonder of stair-building, for Blois, and the misery of my head, after venison! singular to say, I can grapple with the Plague, but so trivial a puzzle as why eating venison

should make my head swim?—that baffles my science.”

Father Joseph bowed himself out and descended alone.

He was not left to lose himself, for the warder was patiently waiting at the foot of the winding steps.

News pertaining to menials travels quickly in their world, and already it was a most remote nook of the vast fortalice where it was not breathed that the new chaplain carried with him the favor, at least of Father Joseph, the *alter ego* of his “Red Eminence.”

But the turnkey took care not to be too deferential. It was not easy to say that he had altered, but the Capuchin perceived all.

“Show me to the room provided for the new chaplain,” said he.

The man was disappointed: he had evidently expected something more theatrical—more in keeping with the mysterious romance surrounding his Grey Eminence.

They went on silently for some paces. Suddenly the monk cried: “Stay! I had forgotten.”

He took out from under his robe the packet confided to him by Doctor Thémines for Paris, and, then, the smaller one, the pamphlet enwrapping the powder.

He fumbled with them both for a moment, then said:

“The doctor gave me this for your gentleman-duellist—”

“No. 7 of the Garden Ward?”

“Didier.”

“It is the same!”

“It is a potion to cheer him out of his melancholy.”

“Poor young man! I will give it him with

pleasure. And yet, what is the odds? I am not with those who think a man should die capering, in his finest clothes, and with a jest or a snatch of a love song! It is a long journey to the Judgment Seat, with, perhaps, plenty of time to change your tune on the road!"

Joseph went on steadily, while the jailer thrust the packet in at Didier's door by the panel.

The Capuchin, shown his room, asked for writing materials and proceeded to compose a report for Paris. He enclosed the papers on behalf of Thémynes' project and wrote this line for the Cardinal, as to Laffemas:

"Let me have Superior Order to release one Diego, *alias* the Matamore, under examination for brawling and robbery with violence. He is dying of fever from drink and wounds and may as well die outside of the Castle walls. In three days, not before, Laffemas may come to try the survivor of the duel infringing the Edict."

When the jailer, going down past Didier's prison-room, peeped in, as was his duty, but he did it from curiosity, he saw a great change in him.

"Decidedly, we have a good chaplain," said he, "but our doctor, too, can operate miracles! how joyous the Doomed Duellist is!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

CUPID CAGED.

Didier had, upon the first knowledge of the visitors, been absent-minded; but the twicemention of "Marie," in the guarded way, had excited him; he reasoned that this strange priest was no enemy, and he awaited development of his wary introduction.

On receiving the powder from the doctor, and his tract, he certainly pushed them aside with scorn; but, at the same instant, his lip ceased to curl for he had perceived, between the somewhat yellow edges of the printed paper, a slip more white. He made sure that he was unobserved and pulled out this inserted communication.

Marion's hand! he kissed it and was amazed, happy and vexed at his having despaired.

"The abyss was deep into which I was plunged, but she is willing to try to cross it on that bridge which love throws over profundity and distances immense, narrower than the sword-edge on which the sons of Mahound cross into Paradise. Wretch that I am, descending so low, and letting her fold her wings and drop to the bottom beside me! Alas! my destiny has entangled her chain of life and she will be crushed with me."

He had persuaded himself that he was accursed, the most disinherited of men born to a lot in heaven!

Most foundlings are fain to indulge in the conceit that their origin is exalted, at least on

one side. Whenever those accidents befall them, during which they are saved from poverty or peril by what one styles a special providence—so vain are we to think that even social gravitation may be suspended in our instance!—these unhappy creatures thank their guardian angel—father or mother—whose spirit they believe is beside them.

Didier dwelt in this error. He would have been outrageous towards one who told him that with a peasant's rearing he would have thought like a peasant. His instructor had said that all men were born equal and that education made the differences; but at the same time this worthy man dilated on the advantages of class, and sought to have his pupil become a "gentleman."

"Marie" had crossed his path and fallen into it, keeping step with him, like this spirit made visible. Sooner than attribute to the messenger transmitting her letter so ingeniously, the superior place, he would ignore that his parents might be seeking him, and give gratitude to Marion for all.

"As all on earth were striking at me," he mused, "repulsing me and driving me into exile, she came as my solace, my hope and my enlightener as to what home may be. What a heart she has, so full of adroitness and love as to solve the problem of conveying a letter to a man in the condemned hold! Her lines console and sustain me! if I am to be delivered, it will be by her!"

The jailer, passing, saw him wreathed in smiles.

"Weak woman, she will save me from my immediate doom, perchance! but can she save one so wicked and unfortunate, from my later

destiny? Yet the fortune-teller assured her that we should be happy together! that fortune-teller, whose trickery I know! Am I to believe in jugglery for which I played the accomplice? But, whatever Marie's success in delivering me, at least, she shows pity for the poor oppressed lonely one! All hated me, and she loves!

"Is it possible, though, that at the same time as I am plunged into prison, she still offers me her heart, what happiness she may obtain, what property she possesses, and her youth and beauty? Oh, prodigal to me, a prisoner under the halter, of gifts which would be stintedly paid for by the wealth of a kingdom! If I escape with my life," he went on, hanging with both hands to the window bars and peering out on the garden and up at the sky between the grey towers, where the swallows flitted and stole threads from the banners to line their nests, "If I leave this stone cage a free man, what can I offer her in return for so much? so little—nothing but madness and poverty! If heaven brought her to me, it is the other place where we must dwell! What an unequal portion! She has never done evil enough to merit that! I never have done good enough to merit her!"

A flourish of trumpets on the esplanade without the garden wall, reminded him of the royal proclamation, the crowd and the Parisian gallants, the quarrel and the duel.

It seemed to him that all was to occur again, but the voice that arose, though the same town-crier's that he had heard, had degraded. Town-criers are but human, and change with the day; this one who had bawled the royal mandate the other time, now repeated

the high-strung harangue of an itinerant show.

"By permission of the Mayor, the Burgesses, the Governor, and the Nobility and Gentry of Blois, I have the honor to state that the illustrious troupe of Master Mondori, of the Drapers' Close, Pont Neuf, Paris, will give three—three—three days' performances, several times a-day, on the Grand Square. Hear me!"

Didier laughed bitterly.

"If a ticket came to me as easily as this note—" and again he kissed Marion's note, "I should be wanting at this dramatic feast! I shall be hanged, and the crowd that saw me dance in air will turn to these players and, perhaps, see my story on the stage! No, I will live for her! I will add a fresh chapter to my drama, at all events! Men have 'scaped from prisons to which this solid Castle was a wicker basket! Oh, Marie, my treasure from which these irons keep me! but not for long! You are my fortune, love, welfare, glory and virtue! Without you, a worm—with your light, a star that has fallen into the mire but struggles, rises, leaps and climbs to bear the reflected lustre where man shall see it! I will escape!"

But in vain did he search every corner and crack—nothing but the swallows of the Castle could be free in their going and coming.

"Impossible! I must owe my escape to her! I must yield to woman's influence, wit and daring, for I cannot save myself!"

He heard unusual going and coming in the prison, the swish of brooms, the washing of water, the removal of cobwebs, the illumination of dark corners where plaster was hurriedly smeared.

"What is this turmoil for?" he inquired of his turnkey.

"Visitors from Paris, sir! the judges are coming to try your case! What an event for Blois! people will flock in from the country almost as they did long ago to see the corpse of the murdered Duke of Guise! Ah, but we will not all live to see it!"

"I will, for one," said Didier with mock gaiety. "The judge is one figure in the phantasmagoria, the headsman another, and, I think, the victim another—quite as indispensable!"

"Truly, you are right, my gentleman! they will come to see you. I only meant that your fellow prisoner, fellow from being in this ward, for he is not gentlefolks—the player Matamore, he will be dead in forty hours, so says the doctor."

"Poor man!" said Didier, inattentively.

"Dying from fever after swordwounds which he tried to cure by some witch's ointment instead of applying to the regular salvers. As for me, let me go regularly out of life! some people, though, will live oddly and so die. It is a certainty," added the warder, seeing that his auditor was listless. "For he has written farewell to his sweetheart—"

"Ah!" cried Didier, turning his head, his eye blazing.

"I thought that would prick him!" muttered the other. "This young man was not moping because he is doomed to the death, but love-sick: Love is like a cordial to these of a loving age! As I was a-saying, sir, this Matamore writes to one Louissette, maid to a famous soothsayer of Paris, one who foretold Chalais' death on the scaf—hem! if she wants to see him alive, she is to travel like a royal courier! Louissette must be a common name in town, sir," went on the talkative functionary, "for

that arch-rogue, his superior officer in brigandage, Captain Malargue, whose account you or the Marquis de Saverny helped to settle, he used to toast 'Louisette' in his cups!"

Didier bit his lips. Was he to be tormented by the phantoms of all these knaves, just because he had honored them by crossing swords with them?

"This man is dying, then?"

"Unless Louisette brings the royal release with her," laughed the man, "which is not very likely! he will be buried in the corner we reserve for the criminals here departing. It will be an occasion for the new chaplain to show how well he can preach a funeral sermon."

"The new chaplain?"

"The Dominican monk who accompanied our doctor."

"Ah!" and Didier sighed, for an attaché of the prison was not, he feared, so useful to him, as one who had free egress.

"Oh, he is as good as a Capuchin any day!" said the man with a peculiar look which his charge did not appreciate, not being in the open secret among the officials that his Grey Eminence was *pro-tempora* acting for the chaplain on the sick list.

Didier looked up; it was not he who hurt the Matamore, at least.

"So this poor fellow is dying of his wounds?"

"Not from those received the other night, when his gang was dispersed by the Marquis de Saverny, and his leader slain; but old ones re-opening; these rascals have their skin traced over with gash and slash like a tattooed sailor, and I have seen them, at Toulon, where I was overseer of the rowers."

His hearer felt relieved: this death fell to the score of Abbé de Gondî.

"I hope this Louissette will come to smooth his pillow," said he, with some deeper feeling.

"He will be a loss," continued the turnkey, loitering by the door, having finished tidying up the room.

"I dare say, to his thieving community."

"No, no, no! to the stage, I mean. A company has come to town—these gentry scent a fair or an execution, for they always pitch their tents where a crowd gathers! a company that counted on having this very actor for their Hector! He was the first person they asked for, before going to beg the favor of the Mayor and the Corporation."

The prisoner made no reply.

"They did not seem surprised, I am told, at their comrade being in prison! what unhappy beings! half their life in jail—although," said the man, laughing abruptly, "it is my life, come to think of it! but, then, I am paid for it! which alters the case! Oh, if you do not object, Master Didier, they will be shifting you into another room when you return from your walk to-morrow! this is a hint I give you—for I ought not to say a word. You understand! if you meditated escape, and had tried to wrench out those bars, ha, ha! all would be discovered."

"Change my room?"

"Why, yes! you can hardly yet have got to like it! like the prisoner of the Old Châtelet who, let out by the coming to the throne of his present Majesty! and that causing the usual general deliverance, did not know where to go to, in Paris, and asked to pass the nights in the guardhouse!"

"It is a matter of indifference to me," responded Didier, although the idea struck him that this either traversed some plan of his only friend, Marion, or, to look on the bright side, assisted towards its result.

"You see, they do not want to bring the judge, who may wish privately to see his prisoner, where the fever-stricken patient lies," said the warden, looking wise.

The next day, when Didier returned within-doors from a daily tour of the gardens, this same warder, wearing a portentous air of mystery and wonder, led him in another direction than heretofore. He was ushered into a room very poor indeed compared with that he quitted.

While not knowing that, usually, the condemned are granted favors rather than denied them, Didier stopped on the sill at this sordid sight and said:

"What means this? this is not only the meaner cell, but it is, unless I was misinformed by you yourself, that occupied by your Matamore, the dying one! Is he dead? is it as a foretaste that I am given the dead man's cell, before the scent of death has been swept out of it?"

"Poor young gentleman!" said the turnkey to himself. "They have not given him the clue! Oh, well, let me play my part! there is a golden guerdon at the end of my task, or I mistake my man!"

He gently pushed Didier into the apartment, and said with a loud and forcedly merry voice:

"Would you jest? Ah, Signior Matamore, your walk has set you up! what an arrant rogue you are to sham sick! Fever! merely to rake up an excuse to get the kind chaplain to

send for your sweetheart to come down from Paris."

"Is the man mad?" muttered Didier, shrinking back to the small window.

"Well," proceeded the turnkey, "you have deceived us all finely and you get your reward! Look! here is your Louissette!"

Holding the door but standing aside, he allowed Didier, who advanced, with curiosity and a kind of instinct, to send his glance up the corridor, all the better lighted as it had been limed for the visit of the authorities.

"Louissette!" gasped he, clasping his forehead, which suddenly beat as if to burst.

"I thought you would recognise her!" said the other, standing aside altogether so that a woman, hastening along the passage, could enter the cell. "This way, my girl! here is your gallant! thank heaven, the good news cured him! come in, without fear of the fever."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RELEASE OF THE MATAMORE.

"Marie!" ejaculated Didier, recoiling but opening his arms.

The turnkey closed the door and went up the corridor, jingling his keys noisily.

"Oh, her second name is 'Marie!'" said he under his breath, rubbing his beard with his other hand. "Ah, they may promise strange things on that stage erected on the square for Master Mondori, but it is in his Majesty's and the States of Blois' Castle that the most remarkable deed comes to pass! Fever, quotha? they remove the right Matamore, because he has the fever! I warrant ye, that this other, his counterpart in spite of himself, has his pulse rapping off a hundred and over to the minute! but that Louisette! they do boast pretty girls in Paris!"

"Marie! Marie! you have penetrated even here, to follow me!" moaned Didier.

Marion wrung her hands, trembling with pain and excitement.

"Is this a reproach? reproach, my recompense?"

"No, never from this heart, which is the shrine of my faith in you, never can a reproach to you issue! But how have you deceived the governor, the chief warder, the guards? Why have you descended into this netherworld where is gnashing of teeth and wailing and tears? Are you making yourself a companion-captive?"

"Didier," said she through abundant tears, her courage giving way, "my happiness is in loving you and being beside you!"

"Let me look on you—let me refresh and regale my eyes, dimmed by the dense air laden with miserable complaints! When my soul was attached to this body by a leash, the other end was held by a demon and an angel! the demon is my bad fortune which brought me here—the angel, it is you! I thank heaven that at this moment I see nothing but the angel!"

"Didier, I am here because you are my lord and master."

"What, is there yet a higher favor at the back of this boon? Are they going to let us be wed before—before—all my mortal happiness flies?"

"Wed?" said she in despair.

"You mean that you have come to be my wife?"

She sighed with an averted countenance.

"I forgive them everything," continued Didier violently. "The injustice, the incarceration, the long isolation, all, for this blessing of holding you as spouse before I quit this jealous and implacable world! My wife, Marie!"

She had escaped from his frenetic embrace, and said, gently, with the voice of one trying to appease a lunatic:

"Be my brother!"

"Oh, no! do not withhold from my parched soul the sacred cup of delight—your being mine before heaven and man! I see, why you came to me in such serenity! you knew the husband would guard his beloved even more carefully than the lover!"

She sobbed now.

The interview had turned otherwise than she

expected. She had seen herself all smiles; she was Niobe, all tears.

"They threatened me with the torture," pursued Didier. "Do you know what my torture was? to think of you shut up above-stairs in that inn, besieged, as it were, by those Parisian gallants! they would halloa at you if you appeared, and storm the stairs with rude words and coarse laughter! It was not the least of the torments I have undergone in my loneliness, that I pictured you surrounded by that swarm of wasps and gadflies! Oh, chaste and noble flower, that you should bloom, and have those insects flutter around you!"

"Didier, be prudent! they may listen without, there!"

"How is it you are here?"

"I do not know! I wrote you a note—"

"It is on my heart! it has pacified my throbbing heart, which swelled to bursting with gall, without that dulcifying kindness."

"My old servant Rose, whose house in the suburbs is my shelter—she offered to pass it in to you."

"I thank her. I thought ill of that woman. Forgive me, in her name. I am apt to think ill of all the world; but not hereafter, this boon being so great!"

"She induced a soldier of the castle-guard to come with the word that I might enter the prison under the name of Louissette and the garb of a waiting-maid. This Louissette was supposed to arrive from Paris."

"Louissette," said Didier, "was the maid of that fortune-teller who was laughed at, often by me, when she promised us happiness! now I revere her talents!"

"I was told that I must pretend to be visit-

ing one Matamore, a playactor imprisoned for some slight offense—”

“Slight? one who waylaid that foppish marquis under your window!” said Didier.

“And who, so their story went, might be released in order to join his comrades entertaining the citizens on the Grand Place.”

“Entertaining! he who is dying of gangrene and fever! What imbroglio is this?”

“What matters, if you are released, whether it be under your name or another’s!” insisted Marion, afraid that he would argue and remonstrate. “Listen! I am convinced that we are puppets! a stronger hand than ours controls us! Why may it not be this good angel that you flatter me with being, but which comes to your rescue and will place you without there, a free man?”

“Free! bound to make you his wife, if only for this act of charity! but, no! you are deceived! Matamore, merely a robber, a vagabond, stole a purse or set the blood flowing in a paltry affray. I have killed a noble—”

“Saverny, dead!” said Marion without emotion, for which the other had looked with jealous suspicion.

“And in the teeth of an express edict forbidding swordplay, with a fatal intent. No, I must warn you that my star is evil. I am ignorant whence I came but I foresee that my step over the edge is into blackness. Marie, receive my last wish—a prayer! turn from me, as if that man whom you wish me to personate were here, and has, indeed, the pest! Leave me alone to pursue my lonely road, a short one now! Alas! before I long went down this road I was awearied of it; it is a hard journey where the sun rises cloudy and the morning sky

weeps; and the sun goes down red and the clouds howl in wrath! The bed that is kept for me, cold with ice, is too narrow for more than one!"

"Your hand is cold," said she; "but your heart must ever warm to me! Let us live in the shadow, though it be of the disgraceful galleys! let me share your flight! at least, let me be the fellow-fugitive with you!"

She clung to him and twined her fingers as if inextricably.

"Admit that I escape," said he, "do you reflect that misery will attend every step we take in exile? My petty patrimony will be confiscated! my rag of a name—I must change that! stealing one that must be better! though it is a beggar's—at least, his father and mother left him that! Perhaps, would follow us long sorrows in the tears of which the lustre of these eyes would finally be extinguished!"

She slipped from his arms as he was about to press his lips to her eyes, and fell on a stone bench, burying her head in her hands.

"I vow to you that this picture is as true as that the fortune-teller showed you! I pity you, for this prospect terrifies me! Away and return no more!"

She rose and, through her sobs, cried in a strangled voice:

"Kill me, but do not speak in that vein!"

"Marie," said Didier, taking her in his arms, "my treasure! why shed so many tears, when I would lay down my life to prevent the outpouring of one alone! Do with me what you will; come with me, if I may go hence, under any name you choose. You shall be my fortune, my glory, my future!"

"You cut me to the heart by what you said,"

she responded, disengaging herself from the embrace.

He fell on his knees, on the granite flags, and bent over her hand which he seized.

"I hurt you, for whom I would die?"

"You are cruel to make me weep—I who have never wept so much as since I knew you!" said the favorite of Paris, recalling her past of festivity and adoration.

How handsome she was, though in the twilight of a prison cell!

A marked but careful rapping on the wicket aroused him from his contemplation.

"Is it all a dream! have they come to awaken me on the scaffold?" cried he, groping as it were for a weapon, not to be forced apart from his idol.

She sprang to the door, full of the same foreboding as racked him.

The wicket slid back and she saw not the jailer, but the Capuchin.

She recognised the Cardinal's familiar, but a bony finger laid on his lips made the almost universal sign for silence. The expression of his visage, as far as the double shadow of the corridor and his cowl permitted to be seen, still farther imposed prudence.

Marion said nothing, therefore, and as her face was turned from the prisoner, the latter perceived nothing unusual.

"There need be no alarm," said she. "I must go. If I can, expect me to-morrow!"

The door opened and she darted out, blowing him a kiss.

Father Joseph was deaf to the sigh which Didier heaved at this disappearance. He caught Marion by the arm and drew her up to the mouth of the passage.

"Have you cheered him, or is it otherwise? for I see tearmarks on your cheek."

"He is not quite so unhappy," replied she, dubiously.

"You shall come again to-morrow at ten. This kind of cordial must not be placed within the patient's reach," said Joseph, smiling grimly, "lest he take too much! there are drugs which fail when not administered in guarded doses!"

"I may see him to-morrow?" exclaimed Marion with a transport which revealed the state of her heart.

"Yes. Meanwhile, return to Dame Rose's cottage. To her, perfect silence! Here, you are Louissette from Paris and that man is the Mata-more of Mondori's show."

Marion went home as in a vision, walking the roseate clouds of Love, which wear a black lining towards the earth.

For the first time, the capricious, ethereal creature, who had imagined that she ruled in her sphere, felt that she was a marionette at the beck of others.

"Father Joseph busies himself on behalf of this unknown Didier! Ah, was it not Madame de Combalet who told me that Joseph never acted in any matter but a secret of State? What secret of the State can this nameless youth comprise in his brain?"

Marion, with all her experience of the court, hardly understood that, for fifteen years, the State was another title for Richelieu.

Twice again, Marion made her call; it was all she lived for. Didier did not count the hours more closely than she did.

"Why are you so grave?" she asked on the third occasion.

"Because it seems a momentous event overhangs us! I am not accustomed to such boons as this providential assistance to enable us to meet, and I fear it is the calm before the tempest breaks. Who is our secret friend?"

To have betrayed her knowledge that the Cardinal's chief agent was facilitating this interview in favor of a man who mocked at the Edict which he dictated and countersigned, would force her to disclose how she was so deeply acquainted with the court. This revelation of her true self was what she dreaded. It would instantaneously strip her of the angelic robe in which his love had clothed her.

It was her one great fear, surpassing all others. How would he bear this discovery, withheld by a hair? with what changed vision would he look upon her?

The silence oppressed both without either venturing to speak. They were like those adventurers in the Alps who pass shuddering, but trying to suppress even the shudder, under a hanging cliff of ice, for the flutter of an eagle's wing might precipitate it upon them.

This breath would wreck her and make Didier more miserable than all his miserable life had known.

The last time! were they meeting for the last time? was this winked-at meeting only a trick of the cruel Cardinal to add a new terror to the death under which Didier lingered?

There was a stir in the town; a horn blew.

They glanced at one another. Was it the trumpet to cry the execution? had the judge arrived from Paris to go through the farce of sentencing a man to death who had convicted himself by drawing his sword on another, under the Edict itself?

She turned pale; he became red, proud that he should mount the platform with so immortal a love in his breast! He would outlive the world—for this passion was only in the bud! the fruition would be in another sphere.

"Do they come to part us?" said Marion in a faint voice as she heard steps in the corridor.

The wicket opened.

"Mademoiselle Louisette, a packet from Paris; the courier has come."

It was the turnkey's voice and his brown, rough hand thrust in at the panel a packet sealed and bound with silk.

Marion had not the force to take it. Didier did so, but his hand was thrilled and his eyes were dazed. The seal was the broad blood-red one of the Minister.

"Open it," whispered Marion, as the warden went away.

Didier opened the packet and read the document within with fevered and doubting eyes.

"Release of Diego, *alias* 'Matamore,' play-actor, on condition of his quitting the kingdom in fifteen days."

"You are Matamore for this purpose," said Marion, scarcely audible as she was choking with emotion. "Let us hasten! Who knows but the real Louisette will be here, at the heels of so welcome a courier!"

"Louisette—the real one?"

"It is the name of a servant of the fortune-teller of Paris," said Marion, surprised at his being in stupor. "You said so! I am personating her, do you not bear it in mind? even as you are supposed to be Matamore, who is released."

"Released?"

"Yes; we must go forthwith! Warder!" she

screamed at the door. "Good news! a release! a release!"

"What, may we go out, together?" said the man with stupefaction slowly diminishing. "I am to be free, to have you by my side? to look on you thus, forever?"

"Yes; the door opens! see! come, come!"

"Wait!" said the turnkey, as he stood in the open door, suppressing a smile. "This is no way for a man next to dead of his wounds and the fever, to leave the Castle! What would they cry at the governor and the officer of the day, to say nothing of the doctor and the spiritual adviser, if we thrust a dying man out, on his shaking legs, like you presume? By the fire that roasted St. Lawrence, think better of us! Here is the hand-barrow. Take that counterpane and envelop our poor Matamore, if you prize him in the least, Damsel Louissette! Oh, you need not show me the release! The governor has read his official advice of it, before you!"

Marion was stupor-stricken. She witnessed, with blurred vision, two sub-warders enwrap Didier in the bedclothing and extend him on a litter which they took up. She followed, with her heart so cold that she might seem to be attending the dying, indeed.

At the little door in the great gateway—for what honors did a playactor and vagabond expect? the Capuchin was waiting. Others kept at a distance from him.

The doctor held a bottle of disinfecting vinegar to his nose.

He lifted the cloth a little from Didier's face and let it fall.

"It is my patient," said he quickly.

"Certify in the book," said the governor, with a similar impatience.

The door closed. The prisoner and Marion, with the litter-bearers, were in the free air!

Marion clasped her hands and paused in a prayer of gratitude. When she resumed the pursuit, the litter had gained the Grand Street.

"Whither are you taking him?" she said, distressed as if all so far was so good that it must turn to the bad.

"To Signor Mondori's theatre," replied one. "They are pulling it to pieces and packing up, but still some of his caravan are on the ground."

Ten minutes afterwards, with a vivacity and intelligence contrasting with the renewed bewilderment of Marion and her charge, who fretted in his hoodwinked and enforced inactivity, Signor Mondori, a plump little Italian with a black face which enabled him to enact the Boabdil without coloring his skin, received "his dear old" Matamore with effusion of joy.

"The very stopgap we wanted," said he, while the two men carried the litter under the canvas of a tent not yet struck down, to the annoyance of the rabble which had followed the little procession. "This is the finest Matamore known in the theatrical profession from Basle to Blois! Look at the figure of him—long legs as if he were a cork ball on compasses! he has a round, strong voice so that you could hear him from the church to the other side of the bridge! You who have never seen true acting, must wait till he pulls himself together again, and when he rushes on to avenge the loss of the noble old man's daughter, or niece, just see him run the wicked Moor through the midriff! Oh,

I tell you this Matamore is fine! Now, our company is complete enough to go back and carry Paris by storm!"

Marion had lingered at the marquee doorway, irresolute, still doubting that a scheme could be so artfully planned and neatly carried out. Mondori bowed to her respectfully.

"You have the jet-black eye for the Ximemas," continued he. "You shall play the fiery mistress of the champions!" Then, taking advantage of the crowd of citizens departing and his own satellites being engaged in clearing the ground of the last appurtenances of this portable theatre, he drew Marion into the doorway, where the pinned-up flap concealed them somewhat, and said in a less flippant voice:

"We shall be out of the town limits in an hour. Take some soup with my daughters and give him, in there, a glass of Oporto. Mark! You are members of my troupe. Why the lady should travel as the hospital nurse for the gentleman, as hale as my hand; whether you are man and wife or mere tender lovers, fleeing the Law; or pure necromancers who want to make the Fair One with the Goldy Locks a captive in some tower grim—these things disturb me not a doit!" He winked roguishly. "You are Senora Maria and he is Don Matamore, whom I have known since he was a boy and played the motive power in the inwards of the golden eagle on which Messire Jupiter descends from the skies to save the hero, in 'Jason in Jeopardy,' by M. Hardy. Lively, lads! We must be far on the road by nightfall!" he concluded, cheering on his men.

While the theatrical caravan was leaving the town by one way, an equipage of formidable character was approaching by the opposite.

CHAPTER XX.

“IT IS A WISE CHILD—”

The cortege was as real and imposing as the theatrical train was artificial and humorous withal its pretensions.

Since the roads were far from safe, reports of the doings of Malargue's gang prevailing up to the gates of Paris, Captain Cavoye, chief of the Cardinal-Minister's military establishment, had detailed twenty-five men, not including officers, of the arquebusiers, armed for battle, to escort a noted member and representative of the ministerial household. They surrounded and cleared the way for a ponderous coach nearly as large, and almost as gaudily gilded, as the living-wagon of Signor Mondori. Its enormous body, garnished with Venetian plate-glass panels, swung on immense leather straps, baldrics for a giant in “Orlando Furioso,” and clattered as all crunched in the ruts and ground to atoms the large stones, strewn in the mire like plums in a pudding. These were left by the carters, good, honest souls, after having used them to stay the wheels on declivities, to do the same service to others—but they were terribly in the way of those who did not require them.

In this vehicle, a small room on wheels, sat, with a secretary and an armed guard, Master of Requests Laffemas, specially appointed to try the first case arising under the Royal Edict against duelling.

It was dusk as this carriage rolled upon the

bridge, where it was stopped. The gentleman noticed the repairs and was under some apprehension that the planks would not bear the weight of his conveyance.

So he alighted, enjoyed the deference with which the bridgeward and his guard received him, with apologies for the governor and Mayor not being on the spot.

"I cannot account for their delay," began the bridge-keeper, "for you were seen coming, but—"

At this instant, a gun was fired on the Castle ramparts.

"But they are saluting," added the man, bowing again.

"Saluting! So is your squeaking old shoe saluting!" corrected the sergeant of the guard. "That is a single gun! Look! It repeats its fire. And, see! The gay flag is lowered and up goes—the black flag, by all that is fiendish! A prisoner has escaped! and one under sentence of death, too!"

"A prisoner, escaped?" reiterated Laffemas, turning green with anticipatory disappointment and twisting his head on its long neck like a vulture from which was snatched a bone.

Sinking his dignity, catching up his gown in one hand and holding his portfolio in the other, he rushed up the ascent toward the Castle, followed by his private guardsman and secretary, who had trouble to keep up with his vehement pace.

In front of the Castle, a woman was kneeling beside a man, ignominiously tossed down on the sward, upon his own tattered long cloak. At a distance, some holding their noses, stood soldiers and citizens.

"Don't go near! It is the plague!" cried

they on seeing the judge and his retinue striding up the hill.

Laffemas stopped short. His two immediate companions almost ran against him. This check allowed the arquebusiers to march up, followed by the coach, and the judge's arrival was made a little more imposing.

At the gate stood the governor, waving his hat in welcome but evidently determined not to leave that cover until this dead body was carted away.

Two scavengers arrived with a barrow. It had served for the removal of Didier and was abandoned after the departure of the dramatic cohort which escorted him.

On their lifting the body and placing it on the litter, with repugnance making the witnesses shudder, strange in such men, the poor woman rose and tearfully accompanied the spurned outcast.

At this juncture, not knowing why he was so espewed, an old woman came up at the best speed of which she was capable.

"Louisette!" she exclaimed, in amazement.

At her name, the girl by the litter turned her head, but it was plain that she did not recognise the stranger appealing to her but who knew her well.

"Dame Rose!" muttered Laffemas. "My mother! She knows her own maid, but why does she almost surrender the secret into the power of these gawks and petrifications? What is the meaning of this obstacle to my reception, and who has escaped the prison?"

"Didier, your 'case,' has got away!" said the governor, coming forward as soon as the litter was far removed.

"Didier, escaped?" echoed Laffemas, clap-

ping his hand to his forehead and letting his gown fall. "Impossible!"

"But, enter!" continued the governor, an old soldier, who had been hurt by the guest's irregular arrival.

He would not say a word, until they were in his room.

The doctor and the chaplain stood by. The latter's aid had left the Castle.

"This is the way of it," said the Captain of Blois, "as these gentlemen, doctor and chaplain, will bear me out, where my tale wants confirmation.

"We kept two prisoners here, in the same part of the old prison, your Didier, a native of Blois, under arrest for duelling despite the mandate, and one Matamore, a play-actor who was suffering from sword-wounds—"

"And *delirium tremens*," interposed the doctor.

"This developed into a palpable case of the pest. So we had the actor isolated. By a blunder of the warder, however, on his return from the promenade, Didier was shown into the room of the actor, and as the latter was shifted elsewhere for health's sake, no one perceived the change—"

"No one?"

"Oh, the turnkey, of course, but discipline, dear judge! No one here questions—they obey! So the turnkey brought Didier the bread and soup which he would have brought to the other, with the same unconcern. Through this mistake, a singular event occurred: There came from Paris one Louissette, a very pretty girl, with notice forerunning her, that she had obtained the release of her gallant, this Matamore, the tragic actor!"

"Ah! you had notice he was to be released, eh?" broke in Laffemas.

"Certainly. A pretty state of things if we were to let out prisoners on production of papers purporting to be pardons and releases, considering the number of blank letters with the royal signature afloat!"

"Not many with the Cardinal's counter-signature!" interrupted the judge, sarcastically.

"Well, we received our incontestable notice so that when, two days after, that is, this day, Louissette produced the release, we liberated the supposed Matamore—that is, the tenant of his cell."

"But Louissette—"

"Oh, not that Louissette out on the esplanade! another, one to whom she could not hold a candle to light her to dress! Though she is a pretty thing—"

"Another Louissette! Another Matamore!" cried Laffemas, exasperated.

"Yes, it puts me in remembrance of a comedy we acted at Angers, when I was a pupil of the Loyolaist Fathers—the 'Two Dromios.' In short, we let out Louissette I. and *her* Matamore, who was Didier, and when we came to see that Didier was presentable for your examination, since your coach was espied by the lookout in the tower, lo! it was this vagabond Matamore, dead as a bleak on the strand! Dead of the plague—"

"The plague!" repeated Dr. Thémînes. "I have had his room, the passages and the whole route which his corpse followed, washed with charcoal water and proof-vinegar!"

Laffemas had listened with consternation, but in the time he had regained his wits. There was too much happy accident in such an

escape to content him. He looked round suspiciously, but the faces of doctors, chaplains and governors—of prisons, are not usually maps on which the mind tracings are to be read.

He bit his lip.

"Let me see the release," said he, after the pause. "Cheret," he added to his secretary, "go out on the parade, and bring me in the old woman who called by name the mourner beside the plague-stricken man."

A room was ready for him. He installed himself in it; took the refreshment he needed after his journey and the shock of baffled spite, and meditated, lonely, at length.

Dame Rose came in.

Judge Laffemas dismissed his secretary with order to stand at the door with his guard, and allow no interruption.

"Mother," said he, in a low voice and bending toward her, where he had seated her at the table. "Was that Louisette by the dead man?"

"That was my Louisette, my trusted maid at Paris, when I acted the soothsayer so admirably, thanks to the full and profound information on my patrons that you afforded me."

"What would I be head of the Cardinal's secret service for, if I could not do that? But, on the other hand, you gathered much of value to us," said Laffemas, nodding loftily and gratefully. "You are sharp in spite of your years. Now, how is that you have been gulled? I repeat, gulled; for here, you should have watched for me, and prevented the escape of Didier. My laurels are at stake! This case, the first under the Edict, would have formed the step on which I rise to oust that fellow

d'Argenson! I long to be Lieutenant-Criminal!"

"I have been played like a fish, my son!" whimpered Rose. "An arch-devil was at work all the while and though I had her under my hand, she acted so acutely and finely that I never suspected her in the slightest degree."

"What arch-devils are there in sleepy Blois?"

"Oh, this one came from the capital. It is Marion—"

"Do you mean Marion Delorme? True, still missing from Paris—"

"She did not return to Paris! She remained here, with that gallant, for the greater evil to Marquis Saverny! Malargue and Matamore, both useful knaves, who served me well when I masked as the fortune-teller. Through her influence at court, I dare say, she procured—not the release of Didier—impossible thing for one infringing the royal decree—but for Matamore. Then she palmed herself off upon the officers of the prison as my maid Louissette, while I believed she was strolling under the prison windows or along the river, moping in lovelorn solitude! While I was having my nap, she was concerting with her Didier how to escape."

"Well, how have they escaped?"

"How do I know? You are very severe with me!"

"Not at all! On the contrary, take the pasty, and the wine! You were always fond of luxuries! Or never would you have succored the poachers and taken toll, I warrant, of the contents of warren and preserve and deer park."

He poured her out some wine and filled his own glass again. Then drawing his own knife,

he cut the pasty and served her. No son could be more attentive. She smiled again.

"Yes, they were rare old times!" sighed she.

"Marion is no fool! she has often deceived those to whom we are but wooden figures," said he, consolingly.

The old woman was about making a gesture of contempt, but there might be too much truth in her son's remark and she let her hand drop.

"It is a proverb at court that it is better to be her ally than her antagonist! Besides, the new shuffle of the cards has it that she did not flee in the direction of Chambord for nothing. The Prince of Orleans has always been infatuated with her, as much as he can be with any woman."

"He would come to Blois, even if Marion had stayed, for his pains. She loves this Didier with all the absorbing passion of a first and only love."

"First and only fiend!" growled Laffemas, with a grimace as if an internal cord were twisted. "Will you never cease harping on that string?"

"Of course, I do not believe in fate, though its arch-minister at times, but—"

"I doubt that you believe in anything!" snarled the judge.

"But some would say that it was a stroke of fate that he should be presented to her in my Well of Truth."

"Well of balderdash! But how came that?"

"Louisette had replaced the actor Matamore, who sneezed during an apparition, by that thievish bully Malargue. Malargue had an encounter with Didier, who was seeking adventures in Paris, and was pitched into the river.

Louissette took Didier for a temporary assistant in my tricks, and I, not knowing, of course, who was below-stairs, bade Marion look into the peeping-tube. She saw Didier. It appears that they both fell in love, on the instant."

"You were very much Marion's friend—"

"There! in that?" cried Rose querulously. "It led her to renounce her life of pleasure, riches, brightness, revelry, to be tagged to the sword-knot of a nobody, who is under sentence of death and wandering Lord knows whither!"

"You are a rarity, mother!" said Laffemas, as if changing the subject, but still pursuing his aim. "You are the only one who has lived an hour with Marion and not been bewitched by her."

"I hate her! and you must hate her, too. If she marries this Didier, and she is capable of committing matrimony to gain her end! mark you *she* will not let the secret of his birth rest! A man may be content to dwell humble and unknown in some distant Eden corner, but a woman who may secure a title—never! She will wed for love; she has a fortune; and she will employ that fortune to discover his parents!"

"I agree with you." His eyes were baleful. "Has she sounded you on the point? Have you blabbed anything?"

"I?"

"You are getting old, and the old are garrulous without knowing how badly! Has she any idea?"

"I want to see you Lieutenant-Criminal, as the good Dominican promises. I want to see you in ermine and blue—"

"Hold! What Dominican? The chaplain

here—there is no other that I know of in Blois.”

“The one who has replaced him while he was sick.”

“Indeed! He was among the officials who greeted me, with little eagerness and no cordiality,” said “the Executioner” of Lis Eminence; “this chaplain, whom I know, as he is a friend of our Father Carré. He did not look ill?”

“I only know what the soldiers gossiped. This Dominican, for he wore the dress of the black friars—called himself ‘The Clerk.’ I,” she went on, hesitating, without being able to distinguish the kind of apprehension suddenly filling her as she felt that her hearer had grown cold toward her without losing any degree of his interest in her communication, “I was only too glad to use him as my agent in corresponding, through Marion, with the imprisoned Didier.”

“Oh,” cried Laffemas, knitting his brows, “you, you facilitated the communication of Marion and her lover? Eh, eh?”

“I wished to lull them till you arrived; to lift that young man’s soul with love so that he should suffer like the Fallen Angel when he dropped out of her arms into the hands of the executioner!”

“You hate him, too—and you assisted in his escape?”

“I have been cheated, I suppose! Then, haste and overtake them! Didier is your game, by royal precept; Marion—you can entangle her in some plot that will award her death! Say she was here to concoct regicide with Prince Gaston—”

“Very well! But you are letting the bubbles

die on your white wine, mother! Have another! and more of the pasty! The aged should fare well, the little time they have here to feast before they sup in Paradise, and compare the edibles of this lower world with the ambrosia above!"

Rose held out her plate, but his manner was strange.

"I will begin the chase," said he, averting his glance, and using his own knife to carve her the slice of pie. "Didier must die!"

"He must soon die!" said she; "too long he has lived, your standing menace!"

"He, a Didier, a menace to me!"

"Can you not guess why? Because—" she leant over to him and whispered in his ear: "Jean, you are in his place."

"I? Has he aspirations to be Master of Requests?"

"He is the Cardinal's son!" said Rose, so terribly clear that his laugh was cut in short.

"Then, I—"

"You are my own grandson! Has not everything shown that?"

"I do not doubt that! It remains to show you that I am truly your son!" returned Laffemas, with odd emphasis.

He rose steadily, having drunk little. He wiped his knife with care and put the napkin which he used in his pocket, no doubt through inadvertence. Yet, men of style still carried table-ware.

"Stay here, mother, and have a nap. If any one comes, simply say that I engaged you to keep my room in order. I shall make this my headquarters while I pursue and bring back this Didier, who, by all that liveth, must die, as you say!"

"Then you must be so high that none can pull you down!"

"Or so far away that a certain long arm cannot reach me."

"That is better! Take me with you! Let us go where I went in my younger days—where the sky is cloudless the longer half of the year; where we might have a host of slaves to tender to our least caprices! India! It is lovely for the rich!"

"A good suggestion! Be comfortable! I may not be long! A fugitive like that, and a chief of the State police! It is uneven battle! You are sure," he said, passing in donning a travelling dress instead of his judicial robes and belongings, "that we alone possess this secret!"

"You and I alone, my dear boy!"

He returned to her, led her to a sofa and tenderly drew his black gown over her, pressing the fur collar up round her neck.

"I am drowsy," she said. "So much stress on my mind and heart—"

"Rest!" said he, kissing her filially on the forehead.

At the door he turned to look back. She had her eyes fixed on him proudly, affectionately, absorbedly, and yet inquiringly.

He hastily sprang out and shut the door.

His secretary and his guardsman stood there, like statues.

"Come with me," he said to the former. "Stay, you, till relieved by the sergeant of the arquebusiers. Let no one pass in there. The woman whom I have engaged for housekeeper is setting out my things. If I do not return, she may remain there all the night."

They were used to his ways, and never ventured to question.

He descended through the devious passages of the Castle, piloted by his secretary who had some knowledge of the place already.

When they emerged on the broad space, three o'clock was striking.

"Who would be called 'the Clerk,' in the Dominican Order?" he asked abruptly.

"I know no such officer in that fraternity, but, master," replied the scribe with a paling face, "is not Father Joseph 'Le-Clerc du Trémblay?'"

Laffemas stopped and made as though to retrace his steps, biting his lip and turning pale likewise.

CHAPTER XXI

A WOMAN WITHOUT JEALOUSY

But a young girl, weeping in her coquettish little apron, almost jostled him, so blinded was she with grief, and he caught her by the arm.

"Louisette!" he exclaimed.

The girl dropped her apron and stared at a stranger so familiarly accosting her, in Blois, of all places.

"It is well!" said he. "I am a friend! I was a patron of your cave in the Blanchapelle Lane! But you, who were so bright, you are in tears!"

"So would you be in tears if you had fresh come from the pauper's grave of your gallant!" retorted the girl pertly.

"Which gallant?" said Laffemas, smiling in her face. "Malargue, Matamore, or their substitute?"

"Sir!"

"Oh, hark ye! Do not play the prude with me! A Parisian! Pshaw! Whom have we been burying?"

Louisette shook a tear out of her eye and responded:

"That poor Matamore! Malargue, having survived a drenching in the Seine, came down to this unlucky place to break his neck in fleeing from a sword! Matamore has died of fever from his wounds! also, a sword!"

"You may say the same sword," observed the Cardinal's "Man of the High Works," emphatically. "My bereaved lass, you have to thank

Master Didier, Number Three in your lovers' list, for the sharp divorce of steel."

"They were slain by that Didier?"

"They owe their death to him! decidedly! Ask anyone who knows! This gentleman! M. Cheret, is not this truth?"

The secretary bowed and in an oily voice replied:

"The deaths of Messieurs Malargue and Matamore are due to Master Didier, it is on record!"

"The brave fellow! To kill such splendid fighting-men!"

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed Laffemas, surprised at the outburst which he had not in the faintest degree expected. "Perhaps, though, you will not applaud him when you hear that he has escaped from prison—"

"The daring fellow! Escaped from that monstrous pile!" she clapped her hands. "Why, he is a hero!"

The Master of the Requests Court was at a loss what to say. This enthusiasm where he had thought to kindle enmity made him lower his head.

"I shall be glad to tell him so."

"Oh, will you? Then, perhaps, you know whither he has gone?"

"I can guess, sir! I followed poor Matamore to the grave."

"It was verily Matamore?"

"No doubt! Therefore, the supposed Matamore, removed under royal order of release because he had not an hour to live in his fever—that must have been the prisoner who escaped! Clever man!"

"You argue like that owl-eyed Laubardemont! Go on! That was Didier."

"They took him to his supposed comrades, of course!"

"Of course! And these comrades—"

"Were the actors of Signor Mondori who have been three days performing on the Grand Square!"

"How kind! To let him die among his comrades! His playfellows! Thoughtful releaser! Bless the King and Cardinal!"

"To say nothing," added Louissette, archly, "of the plague being imparted to the rogues! Depend on it, the clergy had a hand in this act of mercy, in order to rid the country of the actors!"

"Gone with Mondori's troupe!" exclaimed Laffemas, exultantly.

"What have I said?" and the girl wrung her hands, frightened by the fiendish gladness she had evoked.

"That Didier has fled with the strollers!" and Laffemas rubbed his hands in glee.

"Oh, be blistered my lips for letting out that much!"

"Not at all! For you will bless it as I do! I could kiss them for it! Mark, this Didier did not become a solitary fugitive. He had a Louissette with him, the one who procured him the release."

"Oh, the royal release! It is influence, not mercy, which obtains such things?"

"Pretty simpleton, yes! much influence! Such as is wielded by a court beauty! by the court beauty!"

"Mademoiselle Marion Delorme!" cried Louissette.

"You have said it! Now, your Didier is an ordinary, black-and-sour-visaged youth, whom no one would remark in a crowd, even at Blois!"

but to flee with a Marion is to leap into the river with a millstone round the neck for a buoy! he is lost! your Didier, my Didier, the headsman's Didier, will swing from those battlements, in three days, or my name is not Lafemas!"

The poor girl trembled in every limb. She fell on her knees and muttered:

"The Cardinal's Executioner! there is no hope!"

"Plenty of hope for revenge!" hissed the judge in her ear.

"Revenge? on whom?"

"Did you not hear that Didier has fled, not alone, but with the beautiful Marion Delorme?"

"I do not hate him for that, or wonder! she is truly beautiful!"

"But she has run away with your gallant, little idiot!"

"Then he did not love me! all is over. Leave me to die!"

"But I want you to accompany me to identify this Didier!"

"So that you may bring him to the scaffold? never! If you drag me with you, I will bite my tongue in twain rather than speak as you dictate! leave me, or I will curse you!"

"Obstinate woman! but a few days' reflection will bring you to your senses. Cheret, stay with her and have her locked up if she tries to quit the town."

He summoned his arquebusiers to the number of ten, the best mounted, and rode over the bridge on the track of the strolling players.

"Put me in the prison, where the fever rages!" said Louissette wildly as the secretary touched her arm for her to rise from her knees.

"Singular desire on the part of a young wo-

man!" said a voice, methodical and frigid, which made Cheret start.

"Oh, it is our faithful Cheret," railingly went on this speaker. "Who is the woman?"

"Father Joseph, please! it is a girl of the people whom I found in a swoon!"

"Father!" repeated the girl, who had the faith of her class, at the period, in the wandering monks as peculiarly the friends of the poor and oppressed. "What this man says is false! this gentleman," proceeded she, recovering the glibness of speech of a Parisian, "is the assistant of M. Laffemas, the great Cardinal's Executioner, as we say in Paris!" she added, seeing that the Capuchin slightly frowned disapproval of her denunciation. "I am not of the people! but come of the *petite bourgeoisie*, the petty tradesfolk! my father was well-known in the St. Denis quarter, for he kept the draper's shop, at the sign of the Colchian Ram, three doors only from the Gate. This gentle—I should say, villain, is going to lead me into prison, look you, good father! merely because I will not swear away the life of a young gentleman of this town—an old citizen though young—everybody here knows Master Didier!"

Cheret had tried to stop her but her tongue was uncontrollable. Then he looked round at Joseph in despair; he was wearing the Dominican garb and the secretary at once recognised how right he had been to surmise that under his often-used name of Le-Clerc, he had played some part in the recent events disturbing Blois.

"This Didier is the slayer of the Marquis de Saverny," began he.

"In whose service are you?"

"In M. Laffemas'—"

"You are paid by the Cardinal-Minister. You are in his service, therefore. I discharge you, on the spot. Go straight to Paris and be paid your arrears. Straight! do not dare go in to the Castle."

"But my papers?"

"You were engaged to give your whole time to the Minister. You can have no private papers on a journey! Go!"

Cheret bowed to hide his malevolent face and, backing while he bowed, left the priest with the maid.

Thoroughly confident that he would be obeyed without reserve, as manifestly without questioning, Joseph did not do the secretary the honor of a glance to see whither he went, but directed his eyes on the waiting-maid.

"Who are you?" said he. "If you come from town, how do you know this young 'old citizen' of Blois?"

Louissette was convinced from the abject submission of Cheret that she was talking with a great dignitary although he might be assumed to be a poor friar.

She related, not without her smile coming again, how she had sallied out to bring in Malargue, but failing him, had contented herself with Didier to be their demon of the sooth-sayer's jugglery.

"The day he fought with Malargue!" exclaimed the monk.

"Duel! did he fight with Malargue, then?"

Joseph did not reply; he was musing.

"You were maid to that celebrated fortune-teller, then? you and she quitted your house when the police were making inquiries about you all. Where is she?"

"Master," said Louissette weighing her words, "she is a woman with a double face."

"Not unusual. Go on!"

"I believe she was not so young as she appeared. It seems to me, on thinking it over, that she wore a mask of wax, oh! so like life! and that she was really old—very old, for her hands were badly wrinkled!"

"Good! she needed the years of the Sybils to read the lives of her patrons as it is sure she did!"

"Oh, she was marvellous!" said the girl, dismayed. "May I say, father, without injuring myself, that I think I have seen her since her flight—"

"My child, she was a creature of evil. Consequently, you are not betraying in revealing what may benefit justice. I will see that you are protected from her physically, and as for her leading Spirit the Devil, I will undertake to absolve you so that you may defy them both."

Thus encouraged, Louissette, drawing a long breath and glancing at the Castle, said:

"Father, while I was following the bier of poor Matamore, I happened to look back. The judge, whose writer you dismissed—"

"Laffemas?"

"The same! he arrived with much show and pother! I could think it was Prince Gaston coming into Blois! It seemed to me, but I was at a distance, that he was accompanied into the Castle by an old woman, who had all the carriage, you understand, of my late mistress."

Joseph put his closed fist to his mouth and gnawed it, as was his habit from school-days, when deeply pondering.

"That I can readily verify," returned he abruptly.

"Little, but, perhaps, something to you, my Lord!" she gave the title at a venture, certain that she was dealing with a high official of the realm, "perhaps much! Once, that man, the judge, though dressed as a cavalier—which he did not look—and that made me notice him! he called at my mistress's—"

"The fortune-teller's?"

"La Signora Floretia's, yes. But not to have his fortune told! They were very cautious! ordered me out of the room, but—"

"You listened?"

"Well, I caught only a word or two of their salutation when alone—It seemed to me that she hailed him with pride as 'Son—' "

"Good!"

"And that he, sulkily, called her 'Mother.' She used a different voice when speaking with him to that she used for the company and to me, do you see, and that same I called to mind when I heard this old woman accost the judge. It is devil and dam," said Louissette spitefully as a finish to her betrayal.

"Stay in the town," said Joseph quickly. "Here is a gold-piece for your entertainment. When lodged, leave your address at the guard-room there, at the Castle Gates, for 'Father Le-Clerc.' "

He relapsed into meditation, not looking up, and Louissette departed quietly.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FURY OF A THWARTED JUDGE.

After a few minutes, the Dominican-Capuchin proceeded to the Castle where he was more deferentially received every time he came in.

He went straight to the rooms assigned to the Master of Requests.

The Arquebusier Sergeant was at the door, believing it a post of trust and taking little rest.

"The judge has gone, your Eminence," said the soldier, not to be deceived about the "Other Cardinal's" identity by a change of frock.

"I know it. I come to see the person he left in charge of his room."

"Your pardon, Eminence, but the passage is forbidden."

"To me—to the Minister's agent?"

"To all, reverence!" said the arquebusier respectfully but with little yielding in his tone.

He was one of those who were impressed with the legend, long disseminated by Laffemas, that he was the nearest in blood to the Prime Minister. The rapid promotion of the judge was of a nature to make this impression indelible if not altogether unalterable.

"I want to enter there."

The arquebusier barred the door with his sword.

"I see that you require a reminder of your vow of service. You swore, if I recall the words to a letter, to let no obstacle or order stop one coming from the Cardinal, although

a writing to the contrary in his hand was shown. You have not even the writing—not of Judge Laffemas.”

“It is true.”

“Now, you know I am the Minister’s private secretary, who bears his seal, which you see! Now, hearken: I repeat his order, which is that of the State, the King and his Chief Minister: Open that door to me!”

Nevertheless, the soldier hesitated; he was one of those who detested the clergy without being a Huguenot, and wished never to take an order except from a swordsman.

“I give you two minutes, which are running on. Then I will call up the Castle soldiers. You will fulfil your secret and treasonable command, whoever gave it, but you will die shattered by bullets. Don’t be a fool! you are not a Duke of Guise, and you cannot believe fame will record how you fell, defending you know not what woman!”

The sergeant trembled.

At that same instant, a terrible groan of intense pain, mental as well as bodily, burst from the room he was Quixotically guarding.

“You see,” said Joseph, sternly, “you will open the door too late, after all!”

The soldier opened the door.

“I was doing my duty!” he muttered. “Pest on this hydra-headed Crown!”

The monk rushed past him, but recoiled on the threshold.

“Villain!” he cried. “You kept the door for the assassin to have time to escape!”

“Assassin!” repeated the other, advancing after him within.

It was his turn to recoil. Writhing on the floor, sprinkling it with blood from her froth-

ing mouth, the old woman was seen. In one hand was the table cover, which she had seized in her agony, trying to gag herself to repress the effort of nature to seek relief by an outcry.

"Haste for a doctor! Save her and I will not accuse you!" said the Capuchin.

The soldier retreated and reached the head of the stairs at a bound. In a voice hoarse with horror he shouted:

"The doctor! in hot haste! the doctor to the judge's chambers!"

Joseph had knelt down by the dying woman and supported her head on his knee, making a pillow of the folds of his gown. This movement exposed its grey other-side and the blood-shot eyes of the sufferer fixed themselves on it.

"The grey monk! the Capuchin! you are Father Joseph!"

"I am the priest who seeks to smooth your way into heaven!" was the reply, in a strangely soft voice for the gloomy, steeled politician.

"Do not take my confession. Write down what I may have time to say."

He placed her on the sofa and picked up the paper and sheaf of quills which she had pulled off the table with the cloth. The ink-horn had remained on a corner, not even overturned.

By this time, Thémînes had arrived. Joseph nailed him to the doorway sill by an imperative gesture and said to the arquebusier, behind him:

"Close the door, and let no one enter. The priest is receiving the confession of the dying!"

The door closed as if to be sealed, as he put the pen in the ink. With wondrous fortitude or that false strength found in extremity by one filled with a grand purpose, the old woman

rested herself on an elbow and said in an even voice, almost unnatural:

"I am Dame Laffemas, mother of Jean Laffemas, who was father of Jean, *alias* Norbert Laffemas, the judge and favorite of the Cardinal. Fond of my son and to shield him, I consented to act as receiver to a band of deer-stealers, to which he belonged. Thanks to this position, which allowed me to smuggle for the nobles, and thus make powerful friends to save me from arrest, I laid by much money. Thanks to this position, again, there came to me one night, my son, with a young girl of the neighborhood, a daughter of the bourg of Richelieu, named Ramire—heathen name! My son said that, by orders of his superior, the liege lord, I was to proceed with her and my son, to the seaport and thence to a far country.

"We went to the French Indies. Here Ramire gave birth to a boy, after having worked herself into a fever, through beseeching me to help her to escape that it might have been born in France. But the authorities had an eye upon us which we could not elude, for I chafed to quit the country on my own accord, also.

"At this same time, news arrived for my son from France that his wife, a woman of the bourg whom he had been forced to marry, was in a delicate situation. Fired with jealousy, although he did not love her, you understand—he vowed that he would make his way over the sea, spite of all. He fled, was followed and shot in the jungle.

"In the excitement, I fled and, more lucky than he, reached the sea. With me was the child of Ramire, who had died of a serpent-sting at the first stage of our flight. I took ship as a menial, although I had added to my

store by being a sick nurse to the native nobles' harems, and, by being one of the crew and not a passenger, evaded all inquisitive officers at ports where we touched, and was landed at Rotterdam. There I learnt that Goodwife Laffemas had had a son born to her.

"An infernal idea seized me. I conceived this cast into the future: by substituting the boys, I might, at a certain age, produce the wholly base-born offspring of Laffemas' wife as the son of Ramire and her cavalier, while the other, the true son of Viscount Armand Duplessis, since Cardinal-Duke de Richelieu, would rest in ignorance and sequestered until I should otherwise deal with him.

"I managed all this without remark and no suspicion followed me to Blois. I placed Ramire's child, where a certain good woman would eventually care for him. Thus I had him under my eyes, and, from time to time, pretending to aid the woman out of pure friendship for her, I contributed from my hoard that he might be educated as a gentleman. Remorse perpetually stung me, particularly as time advanced and the one known as Laffemas, as this was 'Didier,' introduced to court as the son of a namesake, rose gradually with such certainty that rumor soon accredited him with the name of Richelieu.

"Perversion of the heart! soon I began to like this youth who made good use of his secret and his wits. I wondered—I applauded the baseborn who filled his posts well, committed few errors, and almost bore out the fiction that he was fit to succeed his supposititious father!"

She laughed with the glut of craftiness until choking; Joseph offered her cordial out of a phial.

He was subject to fainting fits and carried this medicine.

"I refuse it. I shall find the strength. But let me sign what I have stated."

She wrote a better hand than one would expect from a peasant.

"You were right not to offer me that wine," said she with odd merriment. "Either that or the pasty is poisoned—my son; as I call him—he has killed me! But I will be even with him and punish in him his faithless mother who deceived my own poor exiled son!"

Resuming her story without excitement, she pursued:

"They grew up; the disinherited one miserable with comparative poverty; the other, the usurper, glorious with power and wealth. This wealth, of which he was liberal to me alone, chained me to him. Having command over the police archives, he searched all that related to the affair of Ramire's disappearance from Richelieu. But he did not discover all. He thinks still that he is a legitimate son of Madeleine Cloche, afterwards Laffemas.

"Time drawing on just before he became Master of the Requests Court and with a further promise of the Proctor-generalship, he became fearful of me. Not that I would betray him knowingly, but old age might make me talkative. He called me to Paris, installed me as a fortune-teller and by supplying me with secrets of the ruling families, helped me to make an impression on the credulous which has not faded yet?"

Joseph nodded slightly, not wishful to gratify the vanity of his heartless harpy.

"Laffemas had fallen in love with the reigning court beauty."

"Laffemas in love with Marion Delorme!" exclaimed Joseph, moved from his rigidity by this unexpected statement.

"He loves her and was afraid to say a word. He would be a laughing-stock since she was besieged by all the lords and beaux. Then again, Marion kept open house for all the plotters so that no one could say she was hostess solely for any party. Laffemas, rising by the Cardinal's favor, purely, dared not risk the suspicion of his coquetting with any of his enemies. He never called on her. He was dying to make her regard him warmly and thought to use my necromancy as his aid.

"Marion came to my house, as all the fine ladies did. Here is where the hand of chance comes in. Laffemas was detained and did not come that day. But by a chance—"

"Say, Heaven!" interposed the monk solemnly.

"Hasard or heaven! Didier, tired of leading a snail's life here, was in Paris, seeing the lions! my maid went out to seek a certain accomplice who aided us in our jugglery, and she accosted the young man. He saw Marion face to face! They loved! do you hear? they loved!

"A minute before, had Laffemas come, he might have laid riches at her feet, a title, all that he relies on wringing or coaxing from his indulgent *father*," sneered the old woman; "as it was, he had lost her forever! all because he was taxing some applicant for a post—for a paltry thousand livres, he lost that treasure, Marion the flawless gem! That is the beginning of his punishment! Now, for murdering me, whom he believes to be his grandam, visit him with more blows of adverse fate!"

"You have done enough for justice," said the

Capuchin gravely, though thrilling at the heart, "now, think only of heavenly mercy! You must forgive the trespasses of others, if you trust to have yours forgiven! Forgive that false wife of your son! your murderer, likewise, and all who have wronged you! As for Didier, who is enormously your creditor, I undertake to obtain his forgiveness!"

"You will reach him too late!" suddenly shrieked the woman, her nerves strained by a pang of intense anguish. "Laffemas is on the road to hunt him! By his death, he will less fear discovery, joined to mine! Haste! for he may be killed with impunity in their arresting him, as under the Edict!"

"I go! but one word: how were you poisoned?"

✦The pasty! cut with a knife poisoned on one side of the blade—I am sure of that, for he partook of both wine and pie! Revenge me! save that young gentleman! save the son of Richelieu!"

Joseph sprang nearer, but with an outrageous spasm which must have twisted and snapped her heart fibres, she rolled over out of his grasping hands and died between the divan and the wall tapestry which she clutched, bit and tore.

The Capuchin straightened himself up, horrified.

"Never have I seen a more ghastly death!" muttered he.

He retreated to the midst of the room, where he reflected.

"What kind of poison? perhaps there will be time to have the body examined. These old hags are mere skin over an osseous frame. Let us try."

He opened the door. On his brow empeared a cold sweat and his usually calm features seemed convulsed as the moribund's had been.

The sergeant shrank back, appalled.

"Retain your guard. Wait to be relieved till I return. Go not within there—peep not! or you will be blasted, like them of old who looked upon the Gorgones!"

In fifteen minutes he had returned, flanked by Captain Gasse, who had entered on his duties, and the captain of the escort of Red Arquebusiers.

"Post each of you a man at this door," said the Grey Eminence with authority. "Another, under the window, of each corps. Let no one enter there but the King's physician, who will arrive from town in the afternoon to-morrow."

He went away to send a courier for Dr. Letellier. On his return from the posting-house, he met Dr. Thémines at the door of the guard-room. He was inquiring about the mystery in the judge's rooms.

"A woman has died of the pestilent fever, which, you know, is raging in these walls," said the monk. "It is a fellow townswoman of yours, Dame Rose, of the little cottage by the Grist Mill of the Augustine Brothers. When your colleague arrives from Paris, examine and report with him. Mark, Dr. Thémines," continued Joseph, with a strange smile, "it will be a reminder to serve you, to have your name appended to the report next Dr. Letellier's."

"The royal physician my colleague?" cried Thémines, with sparkling eyes.

"He will be on the road early in the morning. Receive him well!"

Thémines followed the dread Capuchin to the gates. He returned, murmuring:

"There is a dead one in the rooms given to the judge, the same suite as where Queen Maria de Medicis mourned the murder of the Marshal d'Ancre. Fatality is the host of the Castle!"

Then he joined himself to the posted sentries at that door, determined that no other medical practitioner should perform the autopsy of the old dweller of Blois, but he and the King's.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LED BY AN EVIL STAR.

Judge Laffemas had gradually cast off the insignia and legal-lord trappings with which he commenced his man-hunt, and, towards the third day of non-success, appeared clad like the minor magistracy. Severe in cut, black of hue, of Flemish broadcloth of which the quality betrayed his high rank, his gold chain of office was the only other thing by which a chance-comer might guess that he was not dealing with a petty bailiff. Laffemas did not wear the mien and he had not the stature and bearing of a notable functionary. This gold chain was the emblem of his Stewardship of Champagne, one more of Richelieu's rich gifts to his spurious favorite.

Wearied, the cunning man wore something of the air of a balked fox.

For this want of dignity, of irrepressible courage under difficulties, and testy tone, he paid dearly. The personal animosity his challenges drew from all classes, added to the dormant resentment of the numerous haters of their legal oppressors, returned to his inquiries such a plentiful lack of gain that his retinue were daunted and his spirit would have been quenched if he had not two fateful and potent reasons for coursing after Didier. This man was the sole block in a double sense to his future happiness as he projected it.

Gall was added to a cup tolerably tintured with rue and hyssop by finding in this pro-

vincial obscurity such a thunderbolt as might annihilate him. Not only was he, if his grandmother was to be believed—and that he believed her was shown by his murder of her for the distress she caused him—not only was Didier, we repeat, the true heir to the Cardinal's good graces, but he had achieved a triumph which all the fashionable flutterlings of Paris were solicitous to claim: Didier, by pure love, since he was a nonentity without fortune in gold, had conquered the belle of the court and capital.

Misled by boor, priest and gentry, Laffemas was forced to despatch detachments right and left in the expectation of capturing his prey on a side-path.

Hence, he found himself with a mere squad of his guards, after three days out of Blois, with a sergeant who envied the departed comrades who could not fare worse, and had not the misfortune to be harried under the sly eyes of the Inquisitor.

The remnant grumbled that their horses were foundered by the terribly bad roads and the by-paths which false clues had turned them into. Accustomed to luxuries in Paris, they roundly abused the constant bill of fare, comprising over-fat pork, skinny poultry, skim-milk cheese and black, hard bread, to which the grindstone had contributed grit, to the detriment of teeth, already aching from biting of cartridges.

Still, such bands of itinerant players as Mondori's troupe would seek modest tracks, and would be glad to receive the shelter of barns and hangers, so that the law lord, spite of continual suspicion, was compelled to believe that he was rightly directed from the main road.

But whether the peasants spoke in scarcely comprehensible dialect or the curate and his superiors answered in faultless speech, the replies amounted to the same: they did not catch up with the mountebanks.

In fine, with horses footsore, and the post-horse Laffemas had hired on the down-come of his steed, also going dead-lame, the disconsolate party stopped perforce at a little hostelry undignified with a name, and distinguished from the hovels solely by a wisp of straw tied by a grapevine. In the language of tokens, this signified that they might expect a straw bed and wine. But the sign deceived, like those of other lying prophets hitherto met. They were offered accommodation in a garret so filthy that the sergeant and his soldiers unanimously declared that they would sleep in the stable with their poor chargers, and would dilute a little brandy, prudently bought on the road, with spring water rather than taste the cider, its odor alone so offended them.

Proof through hatred, jealousy and general spite to physical needs, Laffemas, however, felt his gorge rise at this misery after the long journey. He lingered at the door after his followers had bestowed themselves in the outhouse, holding the host by the apron-strings.

"Hark ye, fellow," said he sharply. "I am, as you see, Intendant of a County! a royal servant, and, as good as that again, a servant of the Prime Minister. I am travelling on State service, so it wants but a wink of my eye and a pass of my hand, so, to have you billet my men without a silver-piece for the dues. But I shall deal liberally with you. Keep my men hospitably and tell me, in the interim, where in this desolate neighborhood I can find re-

freshment at which a galley-slave would not heave, and a bed on which a martyr off the grid. would not declare he had exchanged for the worse!"

It is a poor host, not proud of his inn. The Boniface made a grimace, but the golden chain had its magic, and he rejoined with a semblance of content:

"Master Justice—"

"You may even say Judge—"

The landlord of the Straw-truss-and-Vine pulled at his forelock with his right hand and kicked backward with his left foot, which was his idea of a suitable salutation to the dignitary.

"Come this way, sir, to the break in the road," said he, plucking Laffemas by the sleeve and taking him to where a tree had been felled and allowed a view over a wild and unfertile country.

"Ha! good! I see a new house and an old castle! which is the more likely to receive a man of my quality in a suitable manner? I make no secret that I am a Cardinalist, look you!"

He had a view of a moss-grown and ivy-streaming dungeon-based tower, with stone walls in tolerable state of preservation. This was the more strange as the demolition of strongholds was one of the cares of Laffemas' master. Near this antique survivor of the great intestine wars, rose the red-tiled peaked roofs and sharp pinnacles of a new brick mansion, with stone at the corners. The trees and hedges of magnificent holly hid the lower part of both edifices.

"The two are one house," said the host, "for

your purpose. That donjon keep is the old, old Castle of Nangis—”

“Nangis, oh! yes, the old marquis was a great favorite of the late King Henry, and his son honors the old dotard!” commented the judge.

“The new house is all but connected with the old. The Château is used to bring out the younger branches. Under those roofs collect for family councils—one of which I believe they are holding at present, but the news reaches us but imperfectly, and at *lungo intervallo*, as the parish priest says in Latin—”

“At *longo intervallo*,” said Laffemas, graciously, “I understand.”

“The family council, I was saying, comprises the families of the four baronies on which Nangis is placed, as you might say a war-horse stands on four legs. There is Nangis, which is bound in war time to supply the King with a hundred spearmen—it used to be as many knights! God rest the old warriors! Then comes Nesle, Brichanteau, Saverny—”

“Saverny,” repeated the listener as if pricked by a wasp.

“To be sure, Saverny! The young lord, I hear, is making a famous stir in Paris! a wild youth, a ‘rake-shame,’ as they say, but we all have been merry in our youth, that is, all of us who make old bones worth the picking; and he will mend!”

“Saverny! this is bad omen!” mused Laffemas. “I have travelled very roundabout and, ten chances to one, the corpse will have preceded me to that door! But,” added he, brightening up with a ghoulish smile, which made the host recede, “I shall arrive for the funeral feast. Is the road safe?” he suddenly de-

manded of the inn-keeper, as he turned round at the latter's retreat.

"My lord, we leave all the doors on the latch throughout the parish! Since my young lord the marquis took the cream of the lively young men to Paris as pages, footboys and what-not, we live in peace like the *giraffes* and *carob-beans* of Scripture! If your honor continued to wear that gold chain openly instead of wisely drawing the cloak over it, he would wake in the morning as hale as ever and not be found hanging in it! for, truth must be told, whoever it shames, we hold law officers in low esteem!"

"I hope," said quickly the judge, turning again, "that Lord Guillaume up at the castle does not share that uncomplimentary opinion with you folk?"

"No, the old lord is a recluse and knows nothing of the villainies going on! he hates priests only, I dare say, having quitted public affairs since the Bishop—that is, the Cardinal de Richelieu—obtained the upperhand and rules the realm."

"Well, I am not in holy orders," replied the judge, stepping forward briskly for, in spite of the roads being safe, he wished to be housed before nightfall.

The way was clear, along a planted road where the new trees fought for the mastery with juniper, furze and holly. He soon saw, defined in the fading sunlight, the two edifices, old and new.

One was imposing in its grey severity, the other enticing with the vagaries of an architect who combined Italian novelties with a lively wit of his own; the windows sparkled in the declining sunshine with all colors, the carvings of stone and oak showed the clear-cut of new-

ness, the bricks had a warm tone cheering to a wayfarer who had been starved three days.

"But the pest on the mourning!" muttered Laffemas, pausing under the noble oaks of a park in the style of Henry the Fourth.

The huge gateway of the old tower was hung and garlanded with black, and an enormous hatchment, that is, a diamond-shaped board, painted by a town artist, was fastened up against the battlements.

"The host was right," said Laffemas, studying the armorial devices on this mourning-tableau, "there are the arms of Nesle, Brichanteau, Saverny, and Nangis in the centre. The news of the marquis being done to death has certainly reached here, if not the remains of the scapegrace."

Before the great gate, the iron-grill thrown open to facilitate the going and coming of servants, wearing crape ribbons and other marks of woe, were grouped some soldiers of the garrison, for Nangis seemed kept up in war state. These stood respectfully aloof from several gentlemen, who saluted, welcomed, and chatted with two new arrivals.

"It is Brichanteau," muttered Laffemas, slowly drawing nigh and jostled by country-people carrying baskets of fowls, eggs, and fruit, no doubt for the funeral banquet which the judge had scented. "But who is that he is touching elbows with—a sort of Achilles who puffs himself out as though he were master of the ceremonies? well, death brings us acquainted with strange relatives! I suppose this fiery captain is some sprig of the family tree!"

The person to whom M. Brichanteau looked up with an air of deference, which was the cue for his relatives and the domestics to evince

the same regard, was a typical soldier-of-fortune of those days when war was a game over which thirty years was often spent.

He wore a pair of black mustaches which, like his long chin-tuft or *royale*, had been unflecked by Time's silvering touch. But a dreadful wound had lacerated his skull so as to be unsightly and he had donned a palpable, unmistakable wig of grey horsehair, brought down forward where the gash had seamed his forehead to meet a black silk patch over his left eye which it concealed.

He was clad in the uniform of the sub-officers of the Duke of Anjou's regiment, but with a foreign-made gorget of damascened steel, silver and blue-black, and a morion, which might have come down from an ancestor of the time of Charles IX., shining in broad contrast to the plumed hats and flat cloth caps of nobles and servants, respectively, hovering round him.

"What is he?" asked Laffemas, eagerly, of a passing domestic.

"The captain? Captain Dalgarado? he is the majordomo for the obsequies of Marquis de Saverny."

"The majordomo *pro tem.*? Hum! he looks very common to order this establishment about, and have the pert Brichanteau bow to him."

He sidled up to the group and admired, in spite of himself, the martial figure, with that terror of the peaceful citizen for a survivor of siege assaults and charges on the trampled field.

In an interval of giving orders about the procession of magnates when the corpse should be carried from the chapel, where it was lying in state, so Laffemas now learnt, to the family vault on the hill where a cypress marked the

last home of the Nangis-Savernys, the master of the ceremonies happened to catch the eye of the stranger, who made bold to salute him.

"Who is this little fellow with the parchment skin and in sable? The undertaker's man?" queried the captain, of Brichanteau, in a low voice.

"I do not know! But be on your guard, my dear Saverny!" replied the other in the same tone. "He may be a spy, of which he has the appearance, by my fay! If he accosts you, speak him fairly, but in a voice as little like your old one as possible! What the deuce! Have the accent of a veteran with your excellent disguise! Your valet is to be praised for his deception! I have seen actors accounted marvellous whose making up for a character did not approach your assumption."

Saverny—for this "Captain Dalgardo" was that worthy noble, still trying to evade the royal Edict—nodded conceitedly.

"Let me alone! The part fits me like a sheet of wax! I am warmed up to it! 'Sdeath! Have I not cheated my good old uncle, to say nothing of servants who knew me as a boy—and is this little clerk of some rustic tribunal to see through my disguise? It is a pleasure to trick a spy, if spy he be! And Spy is inscribed on that low brow!"

"Still be wary! This fellow is not altogether new to me? Have you ever seen him before?" asked Brichanteau.

"Am I to bear in mind all the shark-faces and fox-noses of the creditors' clerks that have darkened my ante-chamber?" returned the masquerading marquis loftily.

"Be careful!" continued his friend. "His

clothes have a town-tailor's cut! where have I seen him before?"

It is doing Laffemas the justice to state that, convinced of the gentlemen recognising him—so prominent a personage was he, in his own estimation—if he did not adopt some precaution, he convulsed his face so that he seemed afflicted with chronic toothache.

"He is going to address you, surely," were Brichanteau's final words, as a valet plucked him by the sleeve and begged him to come to a lady, in a litter between two mules, in the courtyard. "Draw him out, boy, and we will have him chased out of the county like a writ-server, if he is a spy! But in the name of Caution, use a hoarse voice! Are you not the hero of a hundred sieges and orgies!"

On seeing the speaker depart, and isolation surround the mock captain, Laffemas, bowing again, ventured to step up to the latter.

"What a dreadful calamity!" said he in a piteous voice, making the feint to dry his eye with the flowing lace of his cuff. "What woe to the house of Nangis-Saverny! I understand that your honor was present at the affray?"

The superb captain, as the inquirer still presumed him to be, looked at him up and down with the air peculiar to men of the sword addressed by men of the courts of law; and condescended to reply, in the disguised voice which Brichanteau had recommended:

"You are right, sir! I had the honor to be his second—a duty which has its thorns, I suppose, for, verily! What times and modes! If they hang a noble for fighting a duel, little under a life-imprisonment should await the second in the affair of honor!"

Laffemas bowed to hide confusion.

"I am so little expert in the law," said he, hurriedly, "being but a steward, that I do not know the penalties! But a royal decree! countersigned by the Prime Minister! It is not to be sneezed at, as honest folk say."

"The penalty is that the Marquis de Saverny, of old family though he was—for the head of the house, Lord Guillaume de Nangis, was brother-in-arms of 'the Evergreen Gallant' Harry the Fourth! peace to his memory! 'scaped death by the hangman—faugh! By letting himself be pierced by a lowly blade."

"A lowly blade killed our young marquis?" cried out the judge in sympathy, the more emphatic as the crowd pressed around to hear of the homicide for the twentieth time from the ocular witness.

"He was decidedly killed," resumed the mock captain, curling his chin-tuft with sad reflection. "It was one of the daintiest, killingest thrusts in tierce which I ever saw delivered, and, as the heavens hear me! I have seen thrusts delivered—at my body for that matter which, did the blades still remain stuck in me, would make me resemble the St. Sebastian by Del Piombo in the library yonder."

"I—I thought I heard you say, it was a thrust in quarte," corrected one of the bystanders, wishing to show that he was not a brief sojourner at the castle.

"In tierce, sir!" said the captain fiercely, so that the interrupter quailed and slunk behind Laffemas. "And I ought to be able to define sword-thrusts!"

"Who is better capable?" said the judge with a winning smile. "So, it is matter of history, henceforth, the poor young marquis was pierced by a sword-thrust in tierce?"

"Which in the first place cut through a thick doublet of Spanish leather, soft as silk but warranted dagger-proof by the Genoese who sold it at the sign of the Thumb-bell and Bodkin, in the Rue des Angevins—deuce fly away with him! Then, the callous steel made its bloody way through the side, by the lung, into the liver, and oh! by my soul! what a deluge of blood, as you may guess! Gentleman, the outlet was a wound horrible to behold!"

He covered his face with his hand in deep emotion.

A look of sympathy appeared on all countenances while a groan hailed the speech.

"Of course, he died outright?" said Laffemas, to break the pause.

"No, he—"

"Of course, outright!" interposed Brichanteau, who had returned and now hastened to support the story-teller.

"He died," proceeded Saverny, recovering self-command, "almost instantly! It was a martyrdom of bounded duration!" and he raised his uncovered eye solemnly to the sky where the dark was spreading. "I saw spasms succeed delirium—"

"Ah, me!" said a woman in the outer circle of listeners.

"An awful attack of tetanus succeed the spasms—"

"Misery of man!" cried out a devout servant, crossing himself.

"And," concluded the mock captain, "to the *opisthathonos* came the *improstathonos*!"

"All this to the poor young lord! The saints be good to us!" ejaculated the hearers, and even Laffemas was impressed by the doctors'

Latin which quite paralleled his own Law Latin.

"I never heard the like," said he.

A servant kindled two immense balls of tarred hemp in cressets at the tower gateway and the courtyard was thus lighted. The group, on the point of breaking up, frightened in the dusk, rallied around Laffemas and the mock captain.

"I gather from this," pursued the latter, "that it is erroneous to affirm that the life-stream must issue by the jugular vein. If I had my way with the Lieutenant-Criminal—"

Laffemas shuddered as the single eye was fastened on him, fearful that the speaker divined something of his profession.

"I would have those learned men prosecuted who hold with Dr. Pecquet that the lungs exude blood at the last gasp, for the exemplification of which they vivisect dogs."

"Dead, our poor marquis!" sighed Laffemas, watching the play of ruddy light on the front of the new and the old residences. "To lose all this fine property through a prod of an awl, like that!"

"It was a death-dealing stroke from a long Spanish sword!" said Saverny.

"I conclude that you were a student in surgery, sir?" said the judge, with admiration which the spectators shared.

"All my study of surgery was active, on the battlefield," rejoined the veteran modestly.

"But you must have profoundly read on the subject?" persisted the chief auditor.

"Yes, hem! In Aristotle!" said Saverny, luckily remembering that sage could be cited as a well of universal learning.

"Any one could tell that—and deeply read,

'fore the laws!" cried Laffemas, with enthusiasm.

Brichanteau was again at his friend's elbow. He nudged him to keep quiet, but in vain. The audience urged him on. He was that most incorrigible of actors, one in love with his part.

"In sooth," went on he, while only superficially regarding the stranger against whom he was thus repeatedly warned as possibly a spy, "my heart is one which is far from devoid of malice! Nothing in the world delights me! Gentlemen, I do evil with rapture! I am fond of slaughter!"

The crowd receded a little and Laffemas alone stood his ground so as to confront this terrible slayer of men.

"Hence, it was my intention, when I should enter on a career at manhood, to become either a soldier or a doctor! I wavered, like Buridan's ass, between the two extremes, which are so identical in their aims! Finally, I chose the sword instead of the lancet—it is more gentlemanly and a little less fatal! Ah, how young wits vary—I remember oscillating between the diverse professions of play-actor—"

"You would have made a laudable Slayer-of-Moors—a *Matamore!* incomparable!" exclaimed Laffemas, clapping his hands.

"A poet!"

"Captain Fier-à-bras a poet? I declare I cannot see that!" said the judge while Brichanteau wrung his hands in despair of checking the courser in his bounds.

"Yes, I wrote—" but recalling his epigram about shaving which came near to being *his* epitaph, the marquis halted.

"Actor and poet!" said Laffemas, taking a pleasure in hounding on the speaker with a

faint hope that out of the garrulity would come something to his advantage—he knew not what—but cross-examiners have this impulse to encourage talkativeness.

“Or bear-leader!”

Spite of the mournful occasion which assembled the visitors, a roar of laughter hailed this step toward the ridiculous from the sublime.

“Bear-leader? Well, you were companion, you said, of his lordship the marquis!” said Laffemas cynically.

“But I had a keen appetite, and to have something to eat morn and night, I cast ideas of poesy and the stage and training of Urso to the winds!”

“Come away,” whispered Brichanteau. “Under heaven, I fear that you have been drinking!”

“One moment,” said Laffemas, insinuatively. “Where did you derive this phantasy for rhyming, you, a soldier?”

“Oh, in—what the mischief is his name?—Aristotle!”

“What a charming companion you must have been for the marquis!” said the judge; “he who dashed off witticisms which made the court writhe with hilarity and—the bench issue warrants for his being brought before them!”

“That pasquin! I am lost!” muttered Saverny, shivering.

“Courage! And dismiss this prying knave!” whispered Brichanteau.

“Let me first lull any suspicions I may have raised,” said the mock captain hastily. Then, aloud, he observed: “I, companion of Marquis Nazaire? The Lord forbid! I was not of his

grade; he was a lieutenant when I was but a non-commissioned officer."

"I should have thought you always wore the epaulet!" said Laffemas with inability to suppress a sneer.

"I was in the command of the Duke of Causade when the marquis took a fancy to me, from my skill at the rapier, and the duke, who was not tenacious about trifles—gave me over to him."

"Egad! What a trumpery present!" said Brichanteau, vexed at his counsel remaining unheeded.

"You cannot have more of the cat than her skin!" said Saverny drily. "I was promoted to be officer for teaching the marquis and other noble scions to parry and thrust. I still have a black mustache though I lost my flowing locks by a petard exploding prematurely at the assault on the Red Half-moon at Mons. I am worth my pay, and am willing to prove with firearm or cold steel that I am as good a man as another! That's my tale!"

"Then come away indoors, since you have reached the end!" urged Brichanteau.

"Pardon me," persisted Laffemas, following the gentlemen to the tower entrance. "But you would be in charge of the marquis' remains, since he was your brother-in-arms?"

"True! I had the honor to escort the body from Blois."

"Did the peasant folk seek to steal the bones as a new Saint Nazaire?" questioned Laffemas, no longer able to control his malice, on seeing that some understanding of an occult nature existed between the disguised noble and his friend.

"No, sir! But the roads were not safe!

There was a rumor that, under pretence of carrying out of Blois the corpse of my lamented patron, the Crown sought to transport coin to pay for the galleys building at Nantes. So, as the broken band of Malargue the Flayer was re-uniting, I was told off to organise a counter-troop. I mustered in a score of desperadoes, and, faith! we have deposited the marquis safe and sound—that is, intact, in the chapel yonder!”

“Now, sir!” said Brichanteau with fretfulness, “you have the poor body at rest! Pray thee: good night!”

But the indomitable judge once again caught the marquis by the sleeve in the very doorway and said, in silky tones:

“No more of the marquis, then, since that is your good pleasure! But—”

“It is a spy! He will never have done!” whispered Brichanteau. “Shall I have him cudgelled or ducked in the watering-trough?”

“Your last question, friend?” said the marquis imperatively.

“How does the respected master of the castle take the loss of his adored nephew?”

“Quietly, sir! Ominously quietly,” interrupted Brichanteau.

“Eh, sir! quietly? And yet, it is known, that he loved him as a man of age loves life when he is without children! I have heard that he had but the single hope—to see Marquis Nazaire rule here, married—giving him a little nephew to lead him under those old trees to yonder warm seat by the sun dial!”

Saverny, at last willing to escape this importunate questioner, rapidly plunged into the interior.

“You have heard aright, sir,” said Brichan-

teau, barring the way. "He loved poor Nazaire! With a warm heart, though the snow has chilled his head! Good night!"

"Stay!" cried Laffemas. "In order that I should verify your kind wish of a good night, let me beg your majordomo to accord me a room with a bed—"

"Eh?"

"I am tired—I have come from—from—Tours to see the funeral and the inns will be thronged!"

"Under what quality do you require hospitality beneath this sorrowful roof?" said the other.

"If he has recognised me, I am lost," thought Laffemas. "But, no! I am a good actor, and he is deluded! My back is in danger, but, nothing venture! My lord," replied he, in a steady voice, "I am steward of a lady who was deeply enamored of the late marquis. Hearing of the untimely death, I thought—nay, I know that she will be consoled if I am able to report in what comforting way his funeral was conducted! Let me tarry and see the ceremony!"

Brichanteau made a wry face. But it is always well to have a spy under the hand.

"Tobie—André!" he called out to passing servants. "A guestroom for this M.—M.—"

"M. Norbert, steward—this goes no farther, my lord! to Mademoiselle Marion Delorme!"

"Oh, you are steward to Mar—"

"Hush!" and he laid his finger on his lips. "No scandal in presence of the dead still above ground!"

"You are right! To the room with Master Steward!"

The gentleman turned his back on Laffemas, who followed the valet, muttering:

"I am inside the fort! Now, what is the mystery which makes the dainty Brichanteau pair off with an old camp-follower like that!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STROLLERS.

Didier's short visit to Paris was but an episode classed with his other casual glimpses of town life in his travels.

Hence, he was flung into a new world, only a stage less insupportable than the stay in prison, by his entrance into the circle of strolling players.

These gentry to him were all the Law and the Church designated them: vagabonds.

Broken gentlemen and unfrocked priests entered the army, in preference to going upon the stage.

Amusing, clever, intelligent to the last stage of finished sharpness, regarding the outer world as their prey for its dullness, the actors entertained Didier for but a brief time with their novelty.

Perhaps, had he been alone, condemned to their society, philosophy would have come to his aid and enabled him to support his changed existence.

But with Marion by his side, among the roguish sons of Thespis, every moment was a torment. It galled him that a mountebank should address her on a footing of equality—it seemed to him that the whiff from their sordid frippery sullied her. So with the Spanish costume in which they had garbed her—who might not have worn it before her? Some drab who had been whipped at the cart's-tail and sent to be

drowned in the well of a Rasp-house! It was not the least of the woes which had thronged upon him since he had first crossed swords with Malargue, who decidedly was his bag of unluckiness, that Marion should be mingled with these ballad-mongers.

Mondori in particular kept his ire a-blaze, with his familiar paternal address, the same he used to all the company. They hailed him as "father," and he assumed all the airs of the general paternity. But he was so good-humored, so irresistibly merry, so full of devices which cheated inn-keepers, stupid burgomasters and blundering horse-patrols, that one had to forgive his manners.

But Marion soon taught herself patience for the sake of love, and bore with charming meekness the descent in her station.

"Let us bear with them," said she; "remember, our lives are at stake. In this company we may get nearer and nearer to the confines of the kingdom and, once we cross the border or the seas, we may be safe."

Didier smiled again.

"Yes, I have travelled—how fortunate that same roving now! I have a smattering of tongues, so that we shall not be plundered in England, Italy or Germany—wherever we chance to be wafted by this fitful wind."

The manager of the band had his orders, one would think, for he did not stop to give representations at any of the night-halts. He pressed on with a haste and persistency which amazed the actors; never having seen so much energy and neglect of picking up the gold pieces on the part of the indolent, happy-go-lucky Italian.

It was due to this rapid march without any

performances to delay them, that Laffemas was baffled.

On being asked why he neglected his business, the manager winked slightly, clapped his fat hands together in mock reverence and said:

"Thanks to St. Francis, we have no need to act for ducat, sequin, genevan or Ruyter! Not for a month! In the meantime, live at ease! and guard that couple of new comrades, as our what-do-you-call-it that fell from the sky in 'the Taking of Troy?' Ah, the Palladium! That man and that woman, they are our dual palladium, and while they endanger us—perhaps, why, they also plump out our poor cashbox!"

"St. Francis! What new patron saint has the *padrone*?" inquired the thin, lathy, wasp-like Florentine who personated Scaramouche.

"Do you not recall the Capuchin who earnestly conferred with the manager at Blois, before we received this substitute for that poor Matamore? Well, what is a Capuchin but a Franciscan? Depend on it," said the buffoon, one Signor Le Gracieux, "we owe this streak of good fortune to that friar!"

"Good nothing!" grumbled the black-browed, burly gentleman who played the "Taillebras," that is, the Tyrants, and who was a confirmed misanthrope, "we shall be fried in our own fat if we are captured by the police of the capital! This woman is no ordinary fugitive, and that man slew a noble!"

From Didier's disgust, which Marion's forced affability did not wholly alleviate, the strollers kept aloof, and when the party at a hill alighted from the caravans to walk up and ease the horses, lineal descendants of Rosinante, the loving couple paced the ruts alone.

In these intervals they continued to exchange confidence on their new life, the woman counselling the forbearance she showed, and Didier exhaling his impatience and loathing.

"Do you not think, Marie?" said Didier, with a bitter laugh as, on a hilltop, they turned to see behind them the tawdry train ascending, putting their shoulders to the creaking wheels, carrying the wardrobe, with Mondori guarding the mule on whose back was strapped the money-box which was not a misnomer, for once, in their adventurous progress, "do you not think that I have dragged you down sufficiently low? But you would follow me, wretch that I am, unto the prison pit into which you descended, like the angel who flew down into the healing Pool! My destiny is a funeral car to which your bright one should never have been chained—for it will be crushed in the abyss and you will lie under its fragments! I told you, in the castle keep, that I was unlucky! look on this crew of scarecrows, and answer if I was not right?"

"Didier, are you reproaching me for what I have done to walk by your side?"

She had clasped her hands and trembled in a plaintive mood.

"Never!" he cried out, reckless if he were overheard—lovers are often desirous of parading their transports. "Never will a reproach toward you issue from these lips, blessed by contact with yours! I should be accursed above all mankind, the most deserving of outlawry of all outlaws, which we are at the time being, if this heart were to rebuke you, when you are its sole saint—its faith!"

When, indeed, all was set against him, as he was struck and thrust into ward and duress,

with death the prospect, not even exile as its foil of hope—she had come as his savior.

"Yes," said he, turning his eyes toward her from the evening star as if she were the servant of Venus and he was the liege of both goddess and her attendant, "you are my shelter as you were my only hope when I languished in despair."

"I, saved you?" she faltered.

"It is all due to you, whoever the direct agent of heaven! Who came down from the skies into my limbo but you?"

"Would not that priest be more fit agent of providence?" said she, eager on her part to know more of the motives which made Father Joseph the friend of the unknown Didier as well as her own, for the Cardinal's right-hand man had not hitherto been friendly to her. Indeed, a certain sermon of his, at St. Genevieve's, had been cited to her as pointed at no other mark.

She had mocked, then, saying: "Because his Eminence is the Scarlet Premier, am I to be the Scarlet Woman of this era?"

"Who tricked my jailer?" he proceeded.

"That Capuchin," answered she. "I stand to that!"

"The priest did his part—so did the doctor, the warders, peradventure, the governor of the town and fort, but at least none of these accompanied me in my flight!" said Didier with lover's logic. "Who is the fellow-fugitive but you?"

"Certainly I have abandoned all to follow you," she murmured, without a sigh, although, on the western sky, suffused with the orange sunset, a vision of her drawing-room in Paris suddenly loomed up, and by a trick of the

memory the chatter of the players, mounting the acclivity, seemed the small-talk of the intimates of her boudoir.

"What other woman," pursued the young man, admiringly, "would have had the intelligence, fortitude, and unfailing love to console me in my bondage, sustain me in this hegira of shame and pour on my fainting soul the balm so invigorating of hope?"

Through tears came her pleasant words: "It is the only happiness I have ever known, to follow you and love you!"

"Wipe your eyes and look up—let me see in them what intoxicates and strengthens me for this dolorous pilgrimage! Before I met you, it seemed always to me that I had two shadows, my own and a demon that, unlike the other, accompanied me as well in the darkness as in the light! That shadow has not left me—will it ever quit me? But on the other hand an angel keeps step with me—its wings fan my fevered brow and cool my heated heart! Be blessed, Marie! For you fascinate and concentrate my attention—seeing you, I see no more! Your eyes are two lakes in which my spirit floats, like the swan and its mirrored self—in their compass is all the limit I wish to disport in and exist!"

"What are they mouthing up there?" said the comedian to the manager. "Did you give them a part? I hope it is nothing that trenches on my line?"

"Loon!" replied the manager. "Do you not see that they are doomed to be tragic! That woman might be a queen of no painted throne-room and that young man, who pinked the master of fence, Malargue, has a hand to flourish Excalibur itself! *Per Baccho!* If only

they will spout what is set down for them with the fire they are putting into their dialogues between themselves! We shall be able to re-open in Paris and make our fortunes! Born Morgana, that woman! and born Orlando, that man!"

"Supposing," said Didier, seeing that they were still in advance of the party, which stopped on the hill brink to rest, "supposing, that we cross the frontier or the ocean, will it be there, in the far country, where the King's writ will not run, that you contemplate to make me your lord and master? Come, come, whatever bonds may lie on you in this jealous and implacable France, they must be snapped by the tension of distance."

Marion turned pale. Was there a land of civilisation where her reputation had not preceded her?

"Be content," said she in a shaken voice, "can we not remain brother and sister?"

"Did I refuse liberty when you came into my cell and offered it under odd conditions of mystery and ignominy? Why will you not accept that liberty in exchange for your own? You would not refuse me a drink from this spring! Well, why refuse my thirsty soul the bliss of holding you before heaven and man as my wife?"

"Alas! A wife!" sighed Marion.

"Then, we could wander all the world over in surety, and we should not have to resent the whisper and the slur! Oh, chaste and high-growing flower," he exclaimed in a rhapsody which, without the words being distinguished, delighted the connoisseurs of tirades in the mass of strollers now coming up, "let me be able to show you to the world, proud that

the husband cherishes the purity which the lover respected!"

"Be careful, Didier, they will overhear you!" she cried out.

"Those ribalds!" sneered the young gentleman, without looking round. "Pah! Do not revive the wrath which the sight of them kindles!"

"A ragged escort," said Marion, gravely, "but mark! they defend us! I did not choose them to be your guard—that was the work of a wiser one than I. Think that, with a squadron of dragoons around us, we should have been brought to a standstill at the first garrison town! But, with these tatterdemalions, slipping by woodmen's paths and the goat's trails, skulking past cottages and under the castled cliff, we pass unchallenged! If the gendarmerie and the custom-house officers bar the way, Signor Mondori has his unctuous laugh and a mirthful word which clears the road like a talisman! Oh, happy these idlers who have the 'Open Sesame!' to the robbers' caves of this earth! Who enjoy the mental treasures of which the Forty Thieves cannot pilfer them!"

"In a word," said the man disdainfully and with pain, "you envy them!"

"They may be imprisoned, whipped, branded—expelled from town and burg!" returned Marion sadly, "but at least they will not be suspended to the gibbet! Remember the dead Saverny! remember the deadly Edict, signed by the King and countersigned by the Red Cardinal!"

Her cheek was blanched; her lustrous eyes lost their pearly brilliancy, around the black pupil.

"You are right, and always right," said Didier, changing his fervent tone and relaxing his excited gait to allow the strollers to overtake them with their creaking wagons. "Let my evil destiny cling to me—at least you combat it every moment with your youth, beauty, happiness and hopes! Am I to despair when I see that I have been selected to enjoy these boons, prodigally lavished on me, though our morose monarch would esteem them cheap at the price of Navarre and Bourbon! When is my fate to be other than this one, during which I can repay you with—what? Folly, misery, death! Heaven led me to you but Satan seems to have forged this chain binding us! I have seen on the highway two men linked by steel—one was a malefactor, the other his captor, who was afraid of losing him and so consented to be coupled with sin! I, your prize—whither do you lead me?"

"Where we shall be happy by-and-bye, beloved!" interposed Marion, lowering her tone so that he should imitate her prudence.

"What good have I ever done in my useless, aimless life—or what evil can you have wrought, that we are equalised and I merit you?"

"All I know is that my happiness comes from you—the only happiness I care to feel!"

The vesper bell resounded from a petty church here and there over the darkling vales and, irreverent as were the strollers by practice, habit caused some of them to stop and cross themselves as they murmured the evening prayer.

Didier stopped short and took Marion by the hand.

"No doubt you speak what you think when

you talk in that strain," said he, with a return of his customary gloominess; "but am I to imagine that the fates have done dealing out their black cards to me, and that at last I shall have a *heart—diamonds!* instead of the *clubs* of peasants and the *swords* of their betters? My star is bad! Its course is most oft amid the clouds which obscure and vomit consuming lightnings! Ignorant of whence I came, I fear that whither I go is more melancholy!

"See, Marie, the road branches here! This way, where the troupe goes, it is arid and bleak! So fits it the better for me! Go you thither, over the gentle undulations and those fertile plains! It is time for you to take a new direction or even to turn back—for surely no one will harm a beautiful woman, in this age of gallantry!"

"Indeed!" she sneered with a causticity he had never remarked in her previously.

"Let me go on with these coarse fellows to the first point of proximity to the border. Stay with me and what awaits us at my journey's end? A couch so narrow that it will not suffice for two! And a cold so intense that it would freeze even your eternal youth and whiten your glow of loveliness. Begone!"

"With you!" she replied, fastening her hands on his arm as though the ambulatory actors were coming to divide them.

"You must be reft of sense to wish to share my burden—my banishment—my poverty! Are these the hands to fell the giant cypress of Louisiana? The banian-tree of India? Is the anaconda to be wrestled with and hurled into the roaring cataract, as one drops a bully into the placid Seine? I foresee such prolonged

sorrows that even your unquenchable eyes would be dimmed by tears!"

Marion shuddered, so powerful was the picture he presented, but while she sobbed, she shook her head.

The best mounted of the company passed; the heavy wagons groaned as they surged in the ruts. Scaramouche passed with a smile, the Tyrant, with a frown; the women sighed and looked covetously at the cloudy yet energetic lover and envied Marion, though she wept.

Sometimes, Love delights in these veils of tears over the adorable eyes of his chief enchantresses. How many a landscape fails to entrance until the rains descend and out bursts the cascade under its celestial bow!

"Your fate combined—nay, coalesced with mine appalls me! Begone!"

"You are doing it finely!" said Mondori, sponging his forehead with an Indian handkerchief and smiling on the pair. "I shall cast you for 'Darius' Daughter suing to Alexander!' by the illustrious—illus—really, I forget the author, but the piece is an excellent tragedy all the same!"

He gave them a blessing with his fingers, like the Pontiff signifying a benediction on the world.

Unconsciously, Didier reflected the smile, and instantly changing his tone he said, with great remorse for having caused the weeping:

"Marie, my treasure—so many tears, when to buy the cessation of one, I would lay down my life!"

"Didier, I would sooner you slew me outright than spoke in this heart-rending mode!" said she, rising from kneeling at his feet.

The strollers had passed on: the lovers were alone in the twilight. But it seemed to Didier that an afterglow lingered on the summit of the ascent and enveloped Marion. He caught her in his arms and sued for forgiveness.

The long, serpentine boughs of the straggling ground-elm and beech curved down over their heads and shook the dew, like incense from a sprinkler, upon them.

"Do not depart from me," he continued embracing her as if she were struggling to be free. "Stay with me and be my fortune! Oh, may not inconstant fate abruptly diverge from the course it has pursued toward me, these twenty years, and, for your sake—since you deserve all that this globe provides of delights—shower favor upon me? Be my glory as you are my love—be my guiding-star and lead me on to welfare and felicity! How bewitching you are! No, I cannot live where you are not!"

A distant halloa and a blast of the trumpet which, among the players, represented indifferently Roland's horn, the Wild Huntsman's, the bugle at the gate of the enchanted castle, and so on, resounded from another hill where the troupe paused to rest and await the belated pair.

"A kiss upon our reconciliation—"

"As though we ever quarrelled," responded Marion, pouting.

"And let us on! Briefly, we may be king and queen over this mimic world of the stage! But at the frontier, we cast off the borrowed wings and take a flight into the realms of happiness!"

On the mount Mondori still lingered.

"Good!" said he on seeing the couple. "You made me uneasy, for I hear from a faggot-

gatherer that a squad of musketeers are at an inn over there; it may be a party in search of you. Let us hasten. There," continued he, pointing to the castle tower and the red roof which had attracted Laffemas' attention from almost the same point of view, "that fort which mocks at the ordinance for such bullies of stone to be thrown down, must be a solid habitation where we can find shelter. If haply some feast collects the nobility and gentry there, then our fortune is made! Yes, I see conveyances on the road, for the lanterns glitter like will-o'-the-wisps—all converge to the great house! Take heart, the old fossils are crumbling away—if we meet with a new lord who has been to Paris and wishes well to the Arts, our fortune, as I said, is gilded!"

And locking arms with Didier, to the latter's shocked pride, and followed by Marion, smiling, the good-natured stroller hurried them on to the Castle of Nangis.

CHAPTER XXV.

NO MAN IS A HERO TO HIS SECRETARY.

When the judge rose in the morning, which was at a late hour for the country, from his town habits and his fatigue, the courtyard was lively with company. The tidings had been diffused of the death of the young marquis and, though he had not been seen in the vicinity for some five years, the esteem in which his family was held caused a vast concourse to assemble.

Laffemas, dressing himself still more carefully to appear to be the domestic of a modest household, and lining his face with the black end of a partly burnt sulphur match, which altered his features, descended among the throng. He listened to the conversation but, as the most of the gathering were gentlemen-farmers and squires who took the occasion to grumble at the taxes, at the poor crops and the low price of live stock, he learnt nothing to assist him in his quest for the troupe of Mondori.

Politics were discussed but, as he was a stranger, he noticed that the chat flagged when he approached a knot of speakers. At the most he gleaned that the King was believed a mere painted idol of the court and that the First Minister was feared as much as he was disliked. The aversion sprang, like that ascribed to the Marquis of Nangis, from his being in the priesthood.

He congratulated himself on his incognito,

while dreading it was not perfect enough to deceive the Banneret of Brichanteau, who disliked his astute and ungrateful countenance and had circulated a word against him which he had overheard, accompanied by ill-suppressed laughter.

"This little man in black is a raven! Such are sure to be lured by the dead!"

He had at the dawn again insisted on his friend under the mask being prudent.

"What bird of evil mien would cheat *Æsop*!" said he, watching the suspicious judge in all his perambulation of the park.

All at once, as the air became warm with the sunshine, a hum of pleasure mixed with regretful sympathy rose from all the detached groups which ceased to idle at the crossways and formed hedges so that the master of the castle could proceed on his walk unstayed.

The old Marquis of Nangis did not seem to see anyone as, leaning on the arm of a valet, he took his regular stroll in the beech avenue. He was plunged in a profound spell of grief and meditation. His step was slow, his head hung, and his white hands trembled. He was clad in black velvet, with lace cuffs and collar in the pointed mode familiar in Vandyck's pictures.

Laffemas went up and down the side paths, keeping pace with the aged lord, and in turn kept under supervision by Brichanteau, at whose elbow trotted Saverny.

As soon as the old noble felt the necessity of repose, his supporter led him to a mossy bank, before one of those tricky waterworks, after the Italian manner, which, if one sat in the wrong place, would cause a Triton, who in peace held an empty conch to his lips, to

spout a mass of spray upon the luckless victim.

Fortunately for Laffemas, he had not the impudence to take a seat beside the marquis, though he ventured to walk up to him.

Bowing lowly, he said in a tone of deference and sympathy at which the hearers were surprised, so sincere did it seem:

"Alas! my lord marquis, we have truly lost the hope of the great house! The Marquis of Saverny was such a nephew as one sees rarely in these degenerate days!"

Nangis looked up and, for the first time since he had heard of his nephew being killed and brought to the castle for burial, expressed an interest in what was spoken to him.

"Ah," continued the "left-hand man" of Richelieu with the same faultless imitation of condolence, "there was one who would have softened the harshness of old age! Allow me to weep over him with you!"

"The mischief! are we mistaken in the genus?" muttered Saverny to his sole confidant, "this is rather a crying hyena than a raven!"

"What is he driving at?" remarked the banneret, bewildered.

The two gentlemen approached the couple so as to overhear the dialogue.

"Never was there a better disposition in a young and handsome gentleman!" proceeded Laffemas, still hovering around his prey, so to say, without daring to take the seat beside the mourning one. "He served the All-Merciful as faithfully as he did our Highness the King, son of that Henry whom your lordship served so truly! How reserved the youthful lord was toward the gentler sex!"

"What a liar!" muttered Saverny. "This is

a scoundrel to be whipped out of the yard on sight!"

"Just was he in his deeds," said the panegyrist, lifting his voice on perceiving that he was alluring an audience in the squires who gradually drew near under pretence of bowing to the host. "Wise was his discourse and he handled a very pretty pen!"

"Still harping on my lampoon!" thought Saverny, pulling at his false mustache which almost bristled with his mixed pride and apprehension.

"Many of the quips and *cartwickets* which amuse the finer minds of the capital are attributed to him!"

"The deuce they are!" thought Saverny, wishing for a gag to silence this belauder.

"In one late and notable instance, the King himself deigned to laugh—and the skies above rarely reflect the laugh of the morose son of the *amoroso* King Henry of Navarre and France!—the marquis had composed a most happy hit at the royal Edict against chin-tufts—"

Saverny hastily put his hand over his goatee.

"I would it were meet that one might recite a pasquin on a mundane subject on this occasion, but the saints forbid I should mar your lordship's dolor! In fine, this—" he indicated the chapel with a flourish of his Cambray handkerchief, "this was a brave and perfect nobleman, whom all the historians will celebrate! To die thus and so untimely!"

Laffemas buried his face in his handkerchief and sobbed. The auditory respectfully echoed the outcry. The marquis was visibly deepened in his grief, and he hid his countenance in his thin hands.

"Old Nick fly away with my funeral orator!" whispered Saverny to Brichanteau; "do you not see that he makes mine uncle the more miserable by praising me up to the skies? Prithee, can you not temper the affliction by running me down on the descending scale—confound him!"

"The man is a domestic of a lady of whom you were fond! He thinks to curry favor with me and the rest of the family by laying the colors on thick, as the Egyptian priests gilded the mummy of the patrons who paid best! But let me try to undo this extravagant and hurtful praise!"

He advanced, and elbowing Laffemas a little aside from the still seated noble, said with no politeness:

"You will excuse me, sir, but you do not know what goes on in the town! You are mistaken, all through, in judging my poor boon-companion Saverny!"

The old marquis turned a tearful eye to this interrupter and a slight ire kindled in his dulled orbs.

"Saverny was not a jolly companion! He was a dullard and scoffer at the outset and, by my hope of salvation, deteriorated every day!"

On the secret, Saverny gave him a little nod of approval.

"Witty? He was, believe me, the greatest noodle of the many idiots who dangled hopelessly around the fan of Mademoiselle Marion Delorme! That *you* ought to know, as attached to her house! Brave—who is not brave who comes of the Nangis stock? But he did not handle the sword as well as he did the pen of which you boast—for, look you! a

stranger ran him through, as a butcher sticks a great pig!"

"This is too strong!" muttered Saverny, trying to silence his advocate by a sign.

"As for the pasquin, he repudiated it—all believe his plea that it was written by the fellow who composed his love and other letters! In conclusion, dear my kinsman, his death is worthy of no consideration—save the family, in honor bound, none mourn him but the creditors whom he fooled daily and, perhaps, a light-o'-love whose jewels he borrowed to have reset and pawned with the Lombards!"

The judge had been discomfited by this outbreak, which also astonished the other hearers, coming from the deceased's "best man."

"Do you decry the late lord for fighting a duel?" said he; "that is a pretty cause of blame—that, a crime! that, reprehensible to you who, methinks, have been in the Army—"

"As you, methinks, have been sometime in the law!" retorted Brichanteau, contemptuously rapping the speaker's cane, which with its gilt tip to an ebony cane resembled a wand of office.

Laffemas turned greenish white with alarm; he was alone on a strange ground where his true address might not win him a friend.

"Continue to malign me," whispered Saverny who saw that his uncle had lost his sorrowful air for one of perplexity at the cousin's unexpected denunciation.

"Uncle, Saverny was false-spoken, touchy, ungrateful even to those who paid his gaming debts! The truth to tell, he was not to be regretted!"

"Sir, he was often seen in the churches!"

interrupted Laffemas, seeing that he was losing ground.

"Ay, to wink at the fair devotees and offer them the holy water as they went out to their chairs! For Saverny was a rash, silly libertine!"

"You are going on finely," whispered the pleased object of these cross-purposes.

"Why did he not get on in the Army?" continued Brichanteau, emboldened; "because he was mutinous and not docile, as this gentleman, who taught him the rudiments of drill, will testify!"

Saverny bowed.

"Handsome? Ah, sir," turning to Laffemas, "surely you had not seen my poor cousin recently! He had lost his good looks, as who would not who turned night into day and so dimmed his eyes with the lamps of the basset-table and the private theatre that he was compelled to use one of those double-convex rubies for an eyeglass, the like of which the bald Julius Cæsar, saith ancient history, employed of yore! Purblind; his blonde hair became red; his slightly bent shoulders positively hunched! All said it was in pity that a lass here and there wasted a smile upon him!"

"Enough!" muttered Saverny, treading on his voluble friend's foot.

The old marquis had a touch of color on his wan cheek and his hands began to twitch as though he sought for a cane to chastise this too-frank friend.

"It must have been pity that made the Cytherians smile," resumed Brichanteau, taking breath, and delighted at this opportunity to pay off some petty scores, "for he had no lucre to purchase their sunshine! Generous as was

his uncle, copious as the yield of his estate—on my word, he dissipated all over the dice and cards! The notorious Delorme girl had been his queen of hearts—faith! That on the pasteboard was all the one worshiped now!”

The old marquis tried to rise, but sank back and his lips, white with indignation, quivered in attempts to utter a scathing sentence.

Laffemas thrust himself forward as his spokesman and boldly addressed the banneret.

“My lord, it is inexcusable to speak thus of a deceased nobleman who was also your friend and kinsman!”

A murmur of approval greeted the defence. Decidedly, Brichanteau was overdoing the dash of acid in the sauce.

“If you think that I am overcharging the picture,” said the gentleman, plucking Saverny by the sleeve, “ask this officer.”

Thus put forward, Saverny replied, with infinite embarrassment which the beholders thought did him honor:

“Sir, he was my patron—I will uphold that he was all that you say he is not with sword or lance, on horse or afoot!”

“Bravo!” said Laffemas, assisting the old lord to rise and transferring him to his valet with a commiserating air. “My lord, let this worthy majordomo console you in one way while I do the same in another! Hark ye,” he continued as the valet led the mourner aloof from Brichanteau at whom he darted a reproachful glance, “we shall soon have his murderer under safe ward! His case is certain to end in the march to the gallows! The King has said so—and his Eminence the Cardinal-Minister has confirmed it! Your sorrow penetrates my very heart!”

"This sneaking-soul possess a heart?" said Brichanteau to Saverny.

"Well," concluded Laffemas, standing on tip-toe and hissing after the departing lord with extended neck, "we will hang this Didier with whom the noble lord condescended to cross swords—from your own turret flagstaff if you like!"

"Didier?" repeated Saverny, leaning on Brichanteau's arm, much as Nangis did on his valet; "what a peasant I was to fight with the man to whom I owed my life! Yes, it is the same; I can see that now."

A tall, thin man in black, the worse for wear and smelling of the fetid drugs used by the embalmer of that benighted day, came running up to say a word to the old marquis who had relapsed into his reverie, after the collision of opinions of which his bosom was the clashing-ground.

"What do you want?" challenged Brichanteau.

"I am the undertaker's assistant! Is the hour settled for the interment of the late Lord Nazaire?"

"I" interposed Saverny, solemnly, "I will fix the hour for that function!"

The country gentlemen had turned aside on the master's departure toward the castle.

Laffemas watched Saverny and his friend with growing suspicion, but of what foundation from their collusion—a follower of fashion and a rough soldier—he knew not with any clear definition.

"Why am I loitering here?" he questioned of himself, as he entered the kind of greenery and alcove where the old host had rested. "Is there need for me to see the interment of the marquis,

or at least his coffin's deposition on the shelf of his family vault to be able to file my statement that one of the principals in the fatal duel is out of the grasp of the law? I am losing precious time, for my grandam must be dead and stark before this by hours, and since she would not have betrayed me, fond of her kin as she was! and subtle the poison—nobody but an enemy like Father Joseph will hint that the judge in whose chambers she is found a corpse, had a hand in her taking off! Yet I am anxious about that foe! Richelieu lends an ear to him, and on him shares, with his kittens, an affection with which I am not profusely regaled. Is there anything in the fable of the voice of nature! Would he feel a twinge if he confronted this Didier—in whom I see traces of a likeness! Ah, I must crush this viper and reduce him to carrion, bloated beyond likeness of man, even!"

While meditating, he relaxed his knees and sat down on the bank, near to the spot which Nangis had occupied.

A roar of laughter from Saverny and his companion cracked the air and made all eyes turn toward the bower.

The pressure on a spring, concealed in the seat, had released the stop on the conduit pipe attached to the Triton. The marble figure promptly poured a stream of icy water upon the unfortunate judge who was so shocked and bewildered by the discharge that he stood transfixed in the spout as if frozen.

Then he staggered out of the spray, drenched, and dripping like the Triton itself.

Spite of the sentiment which the vicinity of the dead above ground usually spreads, all witnesses of the ducking of the little lawyer or

steward—another name for harrier among the hounds which torment the farming class—burst into a peal of laughter which accompanied him by echoes, and by repetitions from the servants and guests in the park, as he retreated, sputtering cold water and threats of so sulphurous a nature that they almost converted his execrations into visible steam.

On the road, out of hearing of the hilarity, he stopped to remove his outer garments and shake them, as well as his wig.

“Oh, to repay them all and, chiefly, that one-eyed officer, with his *‘mignon’* companion, for this piece of horseplay! what malevolent god-mother led me into that water-trap—now that I have lost my own beldame? Oh, to be revenged upon all under that roof! If the young master had not escaped us by dying of the wound Didier inflicted I could rejoice at seeing him and that hated one adorn the same triple tree!”

Out of sheer malice he had already given the poor old lord as much pain as lay in his power at the moment.

Forced to confess that the means of gratifying his ill-will could not be invented by his wits, he retraced his steps towards the wayside taphouse where he expected to pick up his escort and resume the hunt for Didier among the strolling players.

He was partly pleased and partly annoyed on seeing several of his arquebusiers and their captain on the road, coming his way.

There was a man in black in their midst, bestriding a farm-colt, whose presence puzzled him till all drew so near that he recognised him at the same time as he was identified by them.

He saw, too, that they grinned at his damp clothing and bedraggled wig.

"It is Cheret," muttered he. "What is my secretary, whom I left at Blois, doing with my guards?"

He turned pale and but for a tremor in his legs would have struggled through the hedge and tried to make his escape over the fields.

"The murder of the old hag has been discovered, and I am blamed for it!" he fearfully conjectured. "Cheret has undertaken to pursue me and bring me to the bar of justice! a pretty thing for a judge, who came down to try a foredoomed criminal, to be tried in the same court! Rather than that—well, I do not know what course is preferable! but, nonsense!" he added, since now flight was out of the question as the horsemen would rapidly run him down, "the old woman would never have denounced me! how staunch was she to the poachers in the days when I was not yet born! it is a proverb at Richelieu! she would not betray her own flesh-and-blood!"

So saying, he awaited, though with trepidation, the coming up of the arquebusiers.

They had collected to the number of fifteen; three or four more, of a rear-guard, hastening up on a call of the bugle.

The captain had called in his stragglers, it was evident, and all had joined the squad at the Wisp-of-Straw.

Cheret had been the nucleus around which all gathered and he was their pilot who regained their master for them.

"Cheret! our dear Cheret!" exclaimed Laffemas quickly, to preclude any questioning on his lamentable appearance, "how glad I am to see you—"

"And I reciprocate, except that I did not want to see your honor in this plight."

"It is nothing—I missed my way and my footing—I fell into the ditch," faltered Laffemas.

"What a sad mishap! but I see, some good Samaritan gave you a pair of shoes and stockings, for they are not wet!"

"A truce to bewailing my accident," hastily said the judge; "how is it you are on this road—"

"My master," said the secretary, in his turn embarrassed, "I was sent about my business, from Blois, by Father Joseph—"

"Sent about *your* business?"

While the soldiers formed a group and refreshed their horses with a little grass, plucked for them with the solicitude good troopers show for their chargers, the two men in black whispered together.

"What was the news fresh at Blois?" went on Laffemas impatiently.

"That I was discharged by Father Joseph from the Minister's employ and ordered to go to town and get my arrears—"

"What, you so greedy for money, came after me, on the contrary—"

"Affection, your honor!"

"Tut, tut!" interrupted the judge in a tone which showed he was not to be deluded.

"Besides, I had overdrawn my pay from the Treasurer!"

"That is more like my acute Cheret. Father Joseph discharged you! dear, dear! from my service—"

"From the Cardinal's—"

"It is the same!"

"Not yet!" returned the secretary.

Laffemas bit his thin lips and motioned him to speak on.

"He told me that, as the Minister paid me, I was in the Minister's service! Father Joseph is not one to argue with."

"What possessed you to run after me?" queried Laffemas with suspicion, frowning. "What occasioned his dismissing you!"

"I refused him admission to your apartments in the Castle!"

"It was my order—"

"At which the Grey Dæmon snapped his fingers!"

His colloquist shuddered.

"Do you mean to say that he removed you from the guard at the door?"

"And the guard, too!"

Laffemas turned green, like one with a nausea. He made an effort to speak and tried two or three times to swallow as if something choked him; he had seen the same effect of dread in persons on whom he uttered sentence of death.

"Then, he entered the room?"

"Your honor, he entered and found the old townswoman dead whom you hired to sweep it out and prepare it for your return."

"Dead!"

"Dead, as that cat in the stagnant ditch!"

Laffemas wanted to express horror, pity—some emotion natural under the discovery, but he could not imagine what a guiltless one would say.

Cheret must have guessed the worst, but all he said was:

"They said, in the Castle, that the doctor went running to the rooms and came slowly out of them. He is mad on the subject of the

Black Death and, of course, pronounced the sudden stroke to be that of the Pest."

"Ah!" sighed Laffemas, relieved.

"But my opinion is—"

"Your opinion?" repeated the other, with a wrench at his heart again where calmness had fallen. "*You* have a medical opinion, M. Cheret, forsooth?"

"I do not see, my lord, why I should not have a medical opinion," impudently retorted the secretary, lowering his voice without that lessening the pertness, "when the pastry-cook of your honor has a medicated glaze for his patties!"

"What say you?" and he lowered his voice, while blanching.

"Merely that the old woman died, I take it, of eating too greedily of the fruit and pasty provided for your honor's refection! Plague on it! it is time she died, she who set all Paris by the ears, and for whom the new Lieutenant-Criminal would be seeking to burn her alive, mayhap, as a sorceress!"

"Of whom are you speaking, dear M. Cheret?" said Laffemas, in perplexity which overcame his fears.

"I am surprised you did not recognise, in this old woman who had sunk so low as to do charwoman's work, the Witch of Blanchapelle Lane, at Paris—"

"The Witch—"

"Certainly! And yet, how would you have guessed that, forasmuch as, in her scene of incantations, she wore a wax mask of superfine execution! she fled through the fingers of that stupid Laubardemont, who has for such feebleness lost the office of Lieutenant-Criminal, and she sought refuge in Blois."

"A fugitive from justice? what a narrow escape I had! he, he! Had I lingered at Blois, it might have been said that I harbored this runagate, of whose identity with the Parisian magician, I give you my word, I had not the slightest suspicion!"

"That is the right thing to say," observed Cheret approvingly. "Without her mask, how the mischief could you be thought to know her? pardy!"

"How is it anybody down here knew her?"

"Nobody who had not dwelt under the same roof could have done it!" continued the secretary. "But her maid, at Paris, had come to Blois to see a gallant of hers before he died in the Castle ward—"

"Lou—"

"—Isette, exactly!" finished Cheret coolly. "She arrived in time to see two of her precious acquaintances elude the new Lieutenant-Criminal—"

"Yes, yes, the new Lieutenant—who is not Laubardemont, you have said—Who has been appointed?"

"My lord," replied the secretary with sudden respectfulness as if he recollected something to change his key, "after sauntering in Blois, cogitating on my dismissal by the Grey Robe, and gleaning all the particulars of the events agitating the dormouse town, *videlicet*: the duel under the very decree against it; the death of the Marquis of Saverny, and the escape by substitution for the dying Matamore of the Bloisian named Didier; the death of the refugee Witch of Paris by—pest or poison; who should ride in at the bridge gates but a royal messenger—"

"A royal messenger!"

"I understand your surprise—this time, it was a royal and not a cardinalistic messenger. He was seeking your honor!"

"Seeking me?" His color going and coming irregularly.

Cheret flipped a large letter, with an enormous red seal on the envelope, out of his inner pocket, and dropped on one knee, having dismounted since his master had conferred with him, after the manner of heralds before a monarch.

"The seal of State!" cried out Laffemas snatching it and bursting silk and wax in his haste. "Long life to the King! I am appointed Lieutenant-Criminal!"

His heart beat tumultuously and a mist covered his little grey eyes which seemed unable to contain the light of exultation which illuminated them.

"How good is the King!" said Cheret, and without pausing, he added: "How good is the Cardinal!"

"An order is enclosed! I am to prosecute the slayer of the Marquis of Saverny to the death!"

"To do which you must pursue him," said Cheret.

"Alas! we have been baffled!" sighed Laffemas. "But procure me a carriage! If we scour the country—"

"My lord, I forgot to mention that I also gleaned at Blois, for my budget, that the pretended Matamore joined the company of players to which belonged once on a time the real actor-ruffler!"

"Well, we were following their caravan, but it vanished in the mists!"

"My lord, when I quitted the College of Amiens, do you know what I most reproached

the good fathers for having taught me? to walk with eyes cast down in meekness!"

"What trifles are you flirting with, as the jester balances a feather? Let us to horse and hunt for the strollers—"

"I am coming to them," continued Cheret with provoking slowness which he his master dared not rebuke. "Thanks to this downcast direction of the vision, I often see what others overlook! When I left Blois, I noticed that the wheel of one of the players' carts was loose of the tire. That wobbling mark enabled me to track it far. Then they had it mended at a smithy, but I procured an accurate description of the new band of iron, which was clumsy and made another-guess sort of a mark, as easy to follow—"

"You followed and you have housed them!" said Laffemas with glee.

"My lord, I was on that track with the guards, whom I brought together from their scattered halting-places, little hoping to meet my lord and present him with the opportunity to justify his high promotion by capturing this malapert Didier—a plain petty gentleman who has dared to kill a marquis of old stock as a peasant boy spits a frog on a willow wand!"

"Let us follow at once!" cried Laffemas.

"Take my horse. I can stick to the mark of the wheel better on foot."

The cavalcade started on this singular quest. In the van walked the secretary, with his eyes on the dust, as if he had lost a purse. Behind him, rode his employer, ill at ease on the cart-horse but ignoring his pains in the double luxury of gloating over his new office and the prospect of arresting Didier, the whole ecstasy a little—only a little—diluted by the shadow of

the Grey Robed one, which would intercept the rays from the iris.

"Cheret suspects that old Dame Rose was poisoned—what thinks Father Joseph?"

But while the police agents might hesitate to arrest a Master of the Requests Court, they would forbear from lifting a hand against their chief. He might bask for a little period, at all events, in the glory of his elevation.

"Much will the King and Cardinal pardon in him who punishes the upstart who mocked at their Edict!" thought he.

The track deviated like a clue dropped by a playful hand, but all things come to an end.

It was as the cavalry stumbled and the riders grumbled upon the need to bait their horses, that Cheret exclaimed, as he pointed past a grove of young walnuts which had obscured the distance:

"There! the train of carts and ragged ranters winds into that castle gate!"

"That Castle!" repeated the new Lieutenant-Criminal, astonished at the trick of fate, "it is the Castle of Nangis! Impossible that merry-makers would be welcomed there! the black flag is flying—the Marquis of Saverny is lying in the chapel there—hark! the bell tolls as the prayers are said over his cold corpse!"

"They enter, corpse or no corpse! And depend upon it, not only is the man Didier in their midst, but—" he rose towards Laffemas who bent over the horse's neck towards him, so attractive was his glance, and added, with a stress which proved that he knew his master's infatuation, "the supreme decoy-duck, Marion Delorme!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MEANNESS OF A NOBLE.

Cheret had not mistaken: it was the company of Mondori which sought shelter in Nan-gis Castle.

No sooner had the dogs of the guests, straying over the grounds after the bones mixed with the rushes swept out of the halls and kitchen, perceived the strangers, particularly disliking those who carried bundles of clothes and the musical instruments, than they set up a furious baying. The hounds, deprived of exercise lately, not only joined in the clamor with yelping but broke their bounds and came rushing, pellmell, with the curs, to surround the new-comers and menace them with exposed fangs.

The players drew their theatrical weapons, which were real enough for a combat, and stood on guard before the tower until a valet ran up and the whippers drove off the dogs.

In the midst of the hubbub, as unseemly as the merriment attending the ducking of Judge Laffemas, Saverny, in his quality of conductor of the funeral, approached and curiously regarded the actors, recognising Mondori, who bore a marked reputation in Paris, and quizzing the ladies of the troupe, who, however, presented no very charming aspect in dishabille and without toilet embellishment.

One of the latter piqued his inquisitiveness as she remained draped in a mantilla, in the Spanish mode, and kept the background, al-

though her grace of carriage and evident excellence of form should have placed her foremost, if she had the Thespian's usual vanity.

Appealed to for harbor, Saverny gravely accorded permission for the wanderers to be entertained, warmly enough to palliate their disappointment at not being able to repay with an exhibition of their talents.

"Give them the red barn," said he to the butler. "Hark ye! the Marquis of Nangis is in mourning for his nephew, so behave decently and make as little noise as you can. To-morrow we bury the dead heir to this estate, you understand, so that you must not raise your jocose songs and recite your comic scenes to mingle inharmoniously with the psalms which will be sounding in the chapel this night."

"We shall make less hullabaloo than your pack of dogs did when they came to yap around our shins," said the chief comedian.

"Impertinent one, have a care for your ears!" interrupted an indignant servant. "Dogs are not strolling-players, 'fore heaven!"

Mondori turned angrily on his actor, saying:

"Hold your peace—do you want us to be turned out to sleep on the highway!"

The grateful comedians filed before Saverny and bowed to him as representative of the generous host. Had Brichanteau been by, or any one whom Marion would have recalled as a town gallant, she would have continued her precautions, but who could perceive in the battered veteran a Narcissus of the time? So she let her veil fall aside as she paced by with Didier at her elbow. The marquis had but one eye available but it saw enough. Moreover, the peerless beauty was not to be mistaken.

"It is Marion!" muttered Saverny as he was

left alone. "What an odd occurrence, though no more strange than the prank I am forced to carry on! Marion among these mountebanks! But how finely the Spanish costume becomes her—how elegantly fits that green *basquin*! If I could be wrong, a comparison with the portrait which I always carry, in her memory, would set me right!"

He looked at a medallion painted expressly for him by the royal painter.

"Is she stage-struck? or has she made a new conquest among the tinsel monarchs? She is not a woman to scamper over the country all alone! I must question one of the party about her."

Since the main object of Mondori was to place his two wards in security, according to his understanding with Father Joseph, one roof was as good as another; besides, the barn was immensely capacious and admirably adapted for rehearsals while accommodating the undesirable guests with plenty of sweet hay.

The party congratulated themselves on their good fortune and began to regard Marion as of fair omen, though the lugubrious Didier did not partake in this impression.

Saverny had not passed ten minutes in skirting the barn precincts before he spied the comic player, whom he hastened to accost.

But at the first words relative to the Donna Ximenes of the company, remembering his manager's warning on that head, the Scaramouche stammered and, catching sight of Didier, who came forth to rid himself of the intolerable surroundings, he said:

"If you want to learn anything about our principal lady, why, apply to her noble com-

panion, this gentleman!" And he proceeded on his errand.

It was to tell a droll story and sing a funny ballad in the kitchen, spite of the major-domo's caution, in order to obtain a relish for his soup.

Saverny had no sooner taken a glance at the new-comer than he was at no loss to recognise his antagonist in the duel and the defender in the conflict with Malargue's band.

"France forever!" muttered he, adjusting his eye-patch and curling his mustaches, "this is my friend! he must have given the alguazils the slip!"

Didier had bridled up at finding himself the object of this scrutiny and stepped nearer the marquis.

"Zounds!" exclaimed the disguised one, in his natural voice, "if you were not the Master Didier who was put in prison, why, I will go blind of the other optic all the rest of my existence!"

The tone of raillery betrayed him and the hearer started with amaze.

"If the Marquis of Saverny were not dead," replied Didier in something of the same vein, "I should say you are his living self! But, dead or revived, may his blood fall on his own head for he brought it about that I should slay him by his rash words."

"Hush! you are the man!"

"And you, the marquis whom these mourn!"

"Yes; and you were in a certain room with a balcony over which you leapt to deliver me from the night-nimmers! hence, I owe you this, my life!"

But the gentleman of Blois drew back as he advanced fraternally with open arms, as to an equal.

"Excuse my surprise, marquis," returned Didier coolly, "but I am of the impression that our second encounter wiped out the obligation!"

"Not at all! You saved me—you did not kill me. That was a trick to enable me to cheat the myrmidons of Richelieu, as you have done by your wit or—" slyly, "a woman's!"

"What woman's?" ejaculated the other, frowning and looking back towards the barn where the reek of soup ascended from the air-hole and subdued chatter in a lively tone arose.

"This!" rejoined Saverny, holding out the medallion of Marion, "take it, happy mortal! you have won the original and I do not care any longer to cherish the likeness."

"Ma—"

"Marion! yes! take it."

Didier seized the portrait and bitterly gazed on it.

It was Marion of the court, in a rich dress and jewels, but also "Marie," as he knew her, with the candid bearing, intelligent brow and black eyes.

Fiercely he began but concluded his question sadly:

"Was it for you that she sat for this?"

"Happy man!" answered Saverny, nodding affirmatively. "It is you she prefers and distinguishes from amid the host! Ah, who would not become a beggar to enjoy her smiles!"

Didier laughed harshly and in a desperate tone.

"It is plain that I am very, very happy!" said he, with his hand tightly closing on the medal that it might be crushed.

"I compliment you," continued the fop, bowing out of character with his assumed rudeness

in mien. "Marion is a good sort of girl, egad! Never has she consorted with any but refined gentlemen! One may be proud of strutting on any promenade with her, she is so worthy of admiration. It gives one a pretty effect, she is so stylish! As they say of such a one: 'That is the fool to the King!' or of another: 'See there, the familiar of the Prince!' so it will be said of you: 'Hail the favorite of Marion Delorme!'"

With a wave of the hand, he refused the portrait which Didier indignantly was about to return to him.

"Keep it, sir! it falls of right to you."

"I thank you," faltered the other, thrusting the medallion within his doublet much as though it were the Spartan's wolf, even if it gnawed his heart.

"That was she in a Spanish dress, of course! 'never saw her more enticing, 'pon my honor! What a merry company she is in now!" said he as the players greeted some sally with suppressed but hearty laughs. "But that is nothing to the company she dwelt in, in the town. Ah, the nights we have had—the two Brissacs, light and soul of junketing! Hist! the great Cardinal himself! Effiat, Argenteau—'fore heaven! a goodly company!"

"Rather too numerous!" observed the hearer grimly. "How shameful!"

"How excellently the Fate who plaits our threads has woven this three-ply!" resumed the coxcomb. "I am not going to stand in your way to felicity! I pass here for defunct! ha, ha! And to-morrow, they will lay me on the shelf in the family vault! ha, ha! You who have baffled sleuth-hounds and keepers, and for whom Marion deceived some castle governor,

no doubt, to set you free, will reach the kingdom's bounds with her among these hilarious rovers! Good! good! it will make a story to regale the revellers!"

"A pretty story, indeed!" said Didier gloomily.

"Be on your guard against a little man in black, who gave out that he was the lady's steward—but, it comes to me that he is a crow of a higher flight! *alcalde*, my dear Spaniard! but, a fig for the pettifogger! Marion could also twist him round her little finger!"

"By the precious Blood!" exclaimed Didier, his eyes flashing, and he stamped his foot as on a serpent.

"Pish! are you jealous?" cried the astonished courtier. "Jealous of the queen of this mundane Olympus? how ridiculous! Poor Marion! poor child! would you go to preach her a sermon on Constancy?"

"I do not preach Constancy," returned Didier in a resolute voice, "but I practise it, sir!"

Bowing, he passed under the trees in a solitary walk, during which his meditation became more and more involved and burdensome.

Saverny stood annoyed and embarrassed at this curt dismissal.

"By St. Nazaire, I am afraid that Marion has degenerated from her stay at Blois! verily, the moss grows on the rose leaves! but to think that, while under the shadow of the gallows, both of us, Saverny and Didier, can laugh at the sentence in the Edict!"

His laugh was cut short by a jostle to his elbow.

"What do you say, captain? that you have Marion Delorme and her dear friend Didier among your guests?"

The marquis sharply turned and with vexation, but it was blunted by a sort of double recognition appearing in the speaker.

"Her steward?" exclaimed he.

"No, no, not the lady's steward, this time, but Norbert Laffemas, the Lieutenant-Criminal of France and Navarre!"

Saverny did not flinch, but he was startled, especially as the judge had exchanged his outer garments for a suit which Cheret must have provided in accord with the appointment he carried, and the proud functionary was backed, at a little distance, by the troupe of arquebusiers.

"Judge Laffemas! the Cardinal's Exe—" began the noble.

"His Eminence's *executor* of special works! ay! But what did you say about Marion and her cavalier, here present, prithee, majordomo?"

The marquis shrank a little beneath those sharp eyes; but it is only fair to say that he instantly recovered his equanimity through aristocratic pride, which enabled him to slip prettily out of his quandary.

He perked up his head haughtily, and with the brusqueness befitting his assumption of the hardened free-lance, answered:

"A malison on the big-wigs and all their tag-rag, moreover! Since you, good my lord, acknowledge that you palmed yourself off here as a domestic, I do not deem you worthy of a reply! Address me anew before gentlemen, and by the great mangonel of—of—Aristotle! I will drub you out of their presence with my scabbard!"

With that he stalked swaggeringly away, believing that his cloak was not penetrated.

When he was at a safe distance, he mused to
- himself:

“Deuce take all blunderers, myself chiefly included, for I have put my foot in it, first with Didier and next with this mock steward! I am a bad actor, who makes errors in each part he undertakes. Yet am I sinning in goodly company, for we are overwhelmed with bad actors enow! What a crew to engird our fascinating Marion! Shame!”

CHAPTER XXVII.

THEMIS AND THESPIS.

Rudely repulsed by the pretended adventurer, Laffemas prowled over to the barn where he was rewarded by intercepting one of the strollers.

One glance through the door as this fellow passed out, had confirmed his suspicion and the supporting hint from Saverny.

The player whom the Lieutenant-Criminal seized by the sleeve was Le Gracieux, whose hump back and paltry air belied his name.

"Who is that member of your band," said he, "attired in tawdry Spanish costume, who keeps in the background among ye?"

"She performs the Ximenes, what we call the leading ladies," was the reply, "but her real name I do not know! we never give our real names in the profession!" added he, loftily, "for under our theatrical cognomens we oft conceal famous ones of noted families!"

"Famous nonsense!" snarled Laffemas, but he was obliged to be coaxing and he fumbled in his new clothes for his purse.

In the meantime the wily actor had reckoned up his interlocutor.

Accustomed to circumvent and baffle the officers of the law, and to perform such characters, which he did with zest, he estimated correctly the wearer of this stiff raiment becoming the magistrate, the face of an Italian sbirro, and the piercing, small eye under the beetling brow. He was about to resume his

promenade and continue his study, when he heard the chink of coin, and, unwonted as was the welcome sound, he spun round with the celerity of an automaton.

He was not mistaken: Laffemas was holding up a fat purse.

"So you are interested, friend," said he, "in our Ximena?" and he sidled up, with his eyes fixed on the lure. "You want to know who she is?"

"Not at all," was the reply; "but who is her Rodrigo?"

Upon this question which indicated that Laffemas, though he might not have the appearance, was an amateur of plays, the actor smiled more and more amiably, and nodded as he said:

"Oho! you want to learn about her gallant—her supporter?"

"Just so! is he in there?" cried the judge impatiently.

"They are inseparable, as befits lover and beloved!"

Laffemas grimaced as in pain and hastily ordered:

"Point him out to me, and—"

"Her lover," said Le Gracieux, "you behold him in me!"

Laffemas felt like taking advantage of the rogue bowing very lowly in sham humility, to launch a kick at him, but the trickster had him at his mercy, perhaps, and he contented himself by jingling the purse over the player's head, to conceal his disappointment.

"Do you know the music of *Genovans*?" queried he.

The Swiss coin was not abundant under Mondori's flag, but Le Gracieux danced a step

to what the tempter called music, and rejoined with ecstasy:

"Ah! there is unearthly melody in its notes, by the mass!"

Laffemas chuckled, thinking he had secured his prey.

"Friend, there are twenty pieces in this purse."

"Humph!" sniffed the actor as though they had a delicious odor, malgre the Roman emperor who perceived no smell in money.

"How would you like to have such music played by your own hand?" cried the judge, holding out the rattling purse altogether too near the avaricious hands which suddenly and dextrously tore it out of the other's grasp—though it was a tenacious one.

"I do like it! My lord!" he proceeded in a theatrical tone, "if this back of yours had a hunch as big as your capon-lined abdomen, and both were money-bags crammed with representative coin of all the realms and principalities, namely, sequins, ducats, rose nobles, drachmas, doubloons and louis, look you! I would—"

"What?"

"Stow all the dross in mine own pouch and say—"

"What, what?"

"You are a generous man and I thank you!"

"Pest on the ape!"

"Deuce take the black cat!" sneered Le Gracieux, laughing in the dupe's face.

"This is a plot! Certainly, Didier and Marion have bribed this gang of mouthing tragedians to keep them perdu in the herd!" mused Laffemas. "Oh, these accursed spawn of Egypt and Bohemia! they will likewise hold their silence. Here," he cried to the retreating actor, "restore

the purse or I will have it wrenched from you by my soldiers!"

"Restore a purse! for what do you take me? What would the world of fashion say of a gentleman, perhaps a law lord, who takes back a gift! one who carried foreign coin and palms them off upon a born Frenchman! for what, forsooth! to buy of me a head and my immortal soul! out on it! deed infamous!"

"That is roundly spoken," said the judge, detaining him from making his exit into the barn, "but I want my money back!"

"My lord, I retain it as a salve for my wounded honor! and I am not calling you a host with whom I have a reckoning!"

Upon which, the clown, making a whirl which cast the dust upon his victim, dived within the barn, slamming the large door behind him.

"A villainous ballad-monger!" yelled Laffemas at his heels until the wooden partition closed between them. "The idea of such base characters having a sense of pride! If I were not hunting more noble game, I should have the whole troupe cast into bondage and whipped out of the province at their own carts' tail!"

He made the tour of the barn, listening to the muffled talk, commonplace yet grandiloquent, of the players, with a laugh at Le Glorieux' no doubt displaying his windfall and relating his adventure in his own way.

"But it is not seemly in the official charged with the Police of the kingdom to net the whole company and pass them one by one through the meshes to discover the pair I want. To seek a needle in a haystack is a trifle to this puzzle!"

Having passed round to the side where his soldiers and secretary could not see his undignified act, he peered in at a crack.

In vain to distinguish the fleeing couple in the dimly lighted confusion of players, trying on dresses, cooking supper, spouting what came to the eavesdropper's ears as gibberish—and was little better!

To try that mass for the fugitives was to seek without a magician's art, in the crucible containing alloys, the ingot of pure gold which might swim disengaged amid the dross in fusion.

On the other hand, how could he return to Paris, as his first essay in the new post, empty handed? How ask the royal confirmation of his appointment if he did not produce the offender against the King's decree?

As he was turning aside, reluctant to give up the quest like a fox roaming a farmyard and tantalized by the fluttering fowls, and as strongly averse to asking hospitality of the Lord of Nangis, where he was the laughing-stock after his baptism, he had an idea strike him.

He clapped his hand to his forehead and laughed outright, like a fiend in a picture of the Last Judgment who has speared a celebrated sinner.

"I have it! I have my Didier!" he murmured, feeling the loss of the coin no more in his rapture.

Returning to the door of the barn, he opened it widely and, with authority, shouted:

"Gentlemen of the Mondori Company, oblige me with a little attention!"

With which prologue, he stepped within the

place and assumed as noble an attitude as possible upon the threshing-floor.

All but Le Gracieux (who thought this apparition betokened an attempt to recover the purse, and he plunged into a heap of hay) quitted their occupation and hurried around the stranger.

They knew by instinct and unhappy habit that it was a magistrate and from the manager downwards feared the worst issue.

But it is doing them the justice to state, without hesitation, that it did not occur to any one to betray the fugitives, on whose behalf they sagely concluded that the intrusion was made. Through the open doorway was seen the formidable array of the Cardinal's guards, and Secretary Cheret was marshalling them as though to support this herald in his errand.

"What is your will?" said Mondori, with his habitual smile chilled on his fat lips by the bearing of Laffemas, which his assumed affability did not wholly correct.

"I am not a man used to academic phraseology," began the judge, making a salute to the ladies, and peering all around to discover Marion and her partner. "The matter is thus. I am an officer in the household of his Eminence the Cardinal-Duke and Prime Minister!"

This diffused an awe which silenced even the baby or two squalling at the breast. The purse-snatcher shook under his odoriferous covering so that the mound seemed animated.

"But reassure yourselves," went on the envoy, smiling graciously, "I am on business which delights the great man's leisure. Known to ye all as patron of the Fine Arts, as witness his establishment of the Academy, he does not disdain to use some idle moments—granting

that a statesman may have idle moments—in preparing plays which will evince another side to his genius of many facets! Yes, gentlemen and ladies of the Thespian art, my Lord of Richelieu regrets that the celebrated troupe of comedians and tragedians, bearing with such lustre the golden name of Mondori!” he bowed to the Italian with captivating condescension, “should have left the capital not fully appreciated. Amends will be done forthwith for this oversight! I am charged to select among ye, or comprise the entire company before me as the stock force for the theater which his Eminence intends to open immediately upon your arrival and study of his tragedy of ‘Mirame,’ in the hall of his new mansion!”

To be sure, the man in the haymow groaned, but the others had but one voice to cheer this speech. The ladies blew kisses—so agreeable, after their fears, was this turn to the prospect, and the man bowed with joyous countenance.

“It is a ruse, master,” whispered Le Gracieux, sneaking out of his covert up to his manager and speaking in a faint *aside*, “he is a cheat! there were but a dozen pieces in the purse which he declared to contain twenty!”

“But,” continued Laffemas, knowingly, “the company which performs to applause in a city oft dwindles down to a poor nucleus when wandering among the rustics. I beg to say that, before I make the preparations for the journey, at my lord’s charges, I should propose that each of you shall favor me with a specimen of his or her skill! a tag of a part, you comprehend?”

“Of course we comprehend,” returned Mondori, wreathed in gleeful smiles, as well his own as upon the broad faces of those surround-

ing him. "I said, all along the road, that good luck would attend us for our noble act! hem! Between ourselves, it was his Grey Eminence who befriended those two runagates—this speaker is but an intermediary, depend on it! The Grey Robe wishes to have his two wards conducted to Paris without fear of impediments from the local officers. Oblige this noodle with an end of a speech and let us to supper, before we take up the return march to Paris! Ah, these rural and suburban audiences are all very well, but for me, give me the connoisseurs—the *cognoscenti* of the great cities!"

Singling out Marion and her companion, who had remained in the obscurity against the wall, he added pleasantly:

"How happy you should be in our party! You will wear brand-new clothes, be sure of a feast every day, and have no greater evil to endure than recite an amateur dramatist's verses! How happy is our fate, as Ariadne said to Theseus—I suppose it would be Theseus? in the tragedy of—of—never mind—ours is a happy fate!"

Marion furtively approached Didier on fully recognising the pretended messenger, and strove to draw him towards the little door at the side of the barn. But he had folded his arms under his cloak, and, avoiding her sueing glance by down-turning his gaze, kept immobile as a statue. The poor woman trembled with impatience and bewilderment at this suicidal behavior in the emergency, while the glad actors pushed one another to be the first to display their qualifications.

Regaining his impudence at the fresh aspect of the affair, Le Gracieux, shaking the straws off his clothes like a bird preening himself of

feathers, had the impudence to come forward and declare himself in the eyes of his startled dupe:

"My lord, since you recruit comedians for his Eminence of whose literary pretensions I have had an inkling, through my friends attached to the *Gazette de France*, behold Le Gracieux, the low comedian of the Troupe Mondori!"

In a falsetto voice he chanted:

"In ancient fable, you have read
Of horrors thick on Gorgon's head!
For grim Medusa here's a fig!
My terror is of legal wig!
You'll see a row upon the Bench,
Suggesting gibbet, torturer's wrench,
Handcuffs, legbands, and eke the whip,
Which at the judge's sentence skip!

"Oh, that a brother-knave should shear
The manes from broken jades to rear
A frightful mop upon a judge,
To make, like wisdom, sound his fudge!
When Rhadamanthus stops his jig,
He'll take no man, but just a wig!"

Mondori had frowned and shaken his head furiously at the carping vocalist, and Laffemas, who had tried more than once to check his reviler, at last screamed, rather than spoke:

"You are singing so badly out of tune that it would scare an osprey! Be quiet—enough! and to spare!"

"I admit that the air may be false, but the sentiment is true!" replied the incorrigible jester.

The bad example was catching, for the "old man" of the company began a tirade from the Spanish repertoire:

"Hem: Scene from 'the Duenna of Honor'—
Hem!

"The fairest sights (hath said a mighty queen)
Are—first: a knight a-charging o'er the green,
A bishop at the altar saying mass,
A miser starving on his bed stuffed out with
brass—"

"The next," said Laffemas; "will the ones I
seek never come forth?"

The "Tyrant" vociferated in his thunderous
accents:

"Behold the fierce Taillebras, from Thibet
come to tell
How I struck down the Mogul, daring to rebel!
And the Great Cham—"

"I've the mind to bid you go back there
again!" said the judge rudely, and the fe-
rocious Stentor drew back, scowling hideously.

His hearer had not noticed his ill-humor for
he had at last spied Marion, who looked lovely
though saddened by her inability to induce
Didier to resume their flight or even regard her
piteous appeal.

"Peradventure," broke in the Taillebras up-
on his reverie, taking it to be dumb admira-
tion, "you would prefer me in a more patriotic
part. You should see me as Charlemagne!"
and swinging his arms like a windmill and de-
claming with uncontainable vehemence, he re-
sumed:

"How odd is destiny! Oh, heavens! hear my
plaint!
My cruel plight would wring a groan from e'en
a saint!

I must cast off my mighty sovereign estate,
And to another yield my love so blithe and
great!

It filled me to the brim with joy intense—
But now embitters with a ruefulness immense!
No longer are the doves to mate within the
dells?

No longer are the bees to cram their honey-
cells?

No longer are the sheep to wear their fleecy
coats?

And from your nannies, you must part, you
bucksome goats!" "

Laffemas had his eyes half closed, watching the unconscious Marion. Aroused by the applause from his brethren at this outburst for the loud-lunged tragedian, the auditor clapped his hands and exclaimed:

"Lovely! admirable! That is Garnier's 'Bradamante' for a hundred louis! what a massive poet!"

"Shall I proceed?"

"No, thank you!" Laffemas hastened to say. Turning to Marion, whom he pointedly addressed, he pursued:

"Let us have a change of voice! the sex, the softer sex! Here is a charming lass! What is her name, manager?"

"We call her Ximena, because she plays those rôles," said Mondori, leading Marion forward, and whispering: "Take heart! speak what you were taught! this is a fine chance to get free transportation to town, where you will meet your befriender!"

Laffemas gloated on the shrinking figure before him. Never had he dreamed to see the blushing one so pale; the arrogant favorite so

humbled; the reckless one so timid. It was an alteration which caused him to hope that he could conquer with terror.

"The Ximena, you say? Let me see: in that piece your lover slays some one in single combat—"

"A duel!" cried Marion, alarmed at the allusion.

"Certainly! I have a good memory—for plays," said Laffemas, jeeringly. "The lover takes to flight and—but tell us the story in mellifluous numbers which, I am positive, will be increased in music by your medium."

The woman averted her sight from him and glanced towards Didier, who remained shrouded in his mantle, and in a tremulous voice recited:

"Since my appeal to honor and your treasured life
Stays not your speeding to your doom with horrors rife!
If e'er you recked I loved you, Rodrigo, wrest—
Oh, wrest me from Don Sancho's arms and hateful breast!
Your falchion draw, to bar me from a course of woe,
If I could to my greatest loathing ever go!
Impose upon me silence while your good blade leaps
To prove no villain safe whom mail of Malice keeps.
If yet to love of mine your own as lovingly responds,
Then, rise a victor in the fight which breaks my bonds!"

At the conclusion, while the comedians ap-

plauded, spite of their jealousy, Laffemas sprang forward, for she was fainting from the wrestling of emotions;—Didier remained so unaccountably cold; and kissing her chill, bloodless hand with exaggerated gallantry, he declared her adorable.

"The ladies will kindly excuse me, but I do not care to hear any other voice after this one, which so surely plays on the inmost fibres of the heart."

Releasing her hand which had not responded to his venturesome pressure, but dropped inert while she turned her eyes once more, without hope, upon the motionless Didier, he said to Mondori, to try to prevent his interest in Marion being too apparent:

"That is Corneille, the new dramatist, and there is no denying that he falls short of Garnier in flow of cadence and sonorousness. But he will improve—you will see, sir, that Corneille will improve, for the Cardinal takes him in hand and, being a playwright himself, the young man must profit by his suggestions! How proud I shall be to present your leading tragedienne to his Eminence! what talent if in the lachrymose vein, as far as that specimen verse showed—what magnificent eyes, though drowned in well-affected tearfulness! The shocking idea of her gifts being buried in the provincial bushel! I take you all under my protection."

He looked back at the doorway, blocked up by Cheret and the arquebusier captain, behind whom the smoking matches of his followers' firearms formed a cloud most ominous.

"My secretary shall get you a chaise, lady!" continued he, advancing as Marion retreated, for the reinforcement had encouraged him.

"You shall have all the honors in our journey to Paris."

On seeing the soldiers, Marion recoiled, and being close to her companion, whispered:

"Didier, rouse thee from this inexplicable apathy! the Cardinal's guards are here! be quick and bold, and you may yet escape by the little door before they surround the barn!"

But the arm which she jostled was rigid as though turned wholly to bone; his eyes remained on the floor and he did not show by a tremor that he had realised their predicament.

Cheret nodded with a knowing air.

"I had anticipated your lordship's desire," said he, "I have a light vehicle at the park gateway!"

"Signor Mondori, follow with your troupe at the best speed. I will share my guards with you, though, in faith! the reduced number ill accords with the state necessary to the Lieutenant-Criminal—"

"The Lieutenant-Criminal!" exclaimed Marion, shuddering at this accession of power to the wretch whom she had already dreaded. "Do you hear? can you cope with this monster now that his venom is redoubled?"

"Come!" said Laffemas victoriously, auguring all that was favorable from the silence following the announcement of his title.

Didier sprang forward, the abrupt movement astounding from the quiescence in which he had so long rested. He overthrew Mondori and stood before Laffemas, flaming with wrath.

"She shall not go, but I will come!" cried he, flinging down broad-brimmed Spanish hat and voluminous mantle. "I am Didier, the doomed!"

To those of the theatrical company to whom

the revelation was a surprise, it was a moment of stupor.

"You can leave these poor good-souls in peace," said the self-made prisoner, "for they were unaware of my identity. You have your prey, mocking fiend that you are! I resume the chain. Had I not chafed under the other—of roses—which I hasten to repudiate, you would not have taken me so easily!"

Indeed, so savage was his bearing, that the Lieutenant-Criminal recoiled under shield of his captain while Cheret drew back without the door.

As if he were leading the way, Didier stalked out of the building.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE GRANDEUR OF A WEAKLING.

The red Arquebusiers' invasion had been regarded sourly by the castle servants; but Saverny had his private reasons for not inquiring too narrowly into their grounds for entering, to intervene prematurely.

But, on seeing Didier walk out of the barn, accompanied by Laffemas, and immediately followed by Marion, wringing her hands and imploring to her lover, he took a step in that direction, whither all gaze was concentrated.

He saw Marion, frozen in the heart by a cruelly cold glance from Didier, who had told her, in a tone to correspond, that she could not divert him from this course.

Saverny waved his cane for the household at hand to come with him and hurried to the spot.

Recoiling, with a hand on her bosom, Marion had fallen on a garden seat where she dwelt unnoticed, save by the ladies of the theatrical company who sank their petty rivalry to bear succor to her.

As the marquis approached, he heard Laffemas, failing to pretend a laugh, hiss to his prisoner with condensed ire:

"So, ho! my master, you are not playing a farce here?"

"It is you who are in the character that is laughed at!" was the young gentleman's rejoinder.

"Oh, I play funny parts badly, I admit! My

forte is in more serious ones, in collaboration with my Lord Cardinal! In our tragedy you are cast for a rôle: that of the Victim!"

Marion, who had been moaning, must have heard this sinister threat for she screamed and half-rose.

Didier turned from her and from the tormentor with the like disdain.

Saverny had arrived, and at his heels were sturdy domestics, who had prudently caught up canes, cudgels and fire-irons, and who, at least, outnumbered the soldiery. This is saying nothing of the guests for the funeral, who looked on at a distance, but were armed, from the insecurity of the roads, and their serving-men were also supplied with weapons of a redoubtable nature.

"Yes, yes," said the Lieutenant-Criminal, with a low taunting humor which disgusted the soldiers, "you may well wriggle your head on your shoulders as long as it is on them to wag! Let us see if you will continue still to act your part as loftily! Come to the chapel where a priest will leave the corpse to help you prepare your spirit for its ascension!"

"Ah!" sighed Marion, rushing forward through the group of actresses and, again repulsed by Didier and the arquebusiers who barred her approach with their firelock rests, she turned her eyes desperately along the earth for a foreign support.

Promptly informed of the intrusion by an officious valet, the old Marquis of Nangis issued from the castle, accompanied by his own guard of halberdiers.

At the mute appeal of Marion, who came tottering towards him with clasped hands and a countenance white as a phantom's, all his

gallantry was awakened. He had been a boon-companion of the late King in his amorous exploits and the call of beauty in distress fired him.

His step was active, his form straightened, and he drew his sword, though a parade one, with a flourish, like a royal champion.

But before Marion could recover voice on seeing this defender draw near, Laffemas glided between with a smirk and a long, low bow:

"My Lord Marquis," said he, "I claim assistance in the name of the King, whose Lieutenant-Criminal I have the honor to be."

"Lieutenant-Criminal!" repeated Saverny, stopping short in drawing his sword and retaining hold of his cane.

"The mask is off!" added Brichanteau, lowering his own hand. "The fox is a tiger-cat!"

"My lord," continued the high officer of justice, "the assassin of poor Marquis Nazaire had fled, but here he is—we have captured him. you see!"

"Nazaire's murderer?" said the marquis.

"Who broke prison, more or less by the aid of this woman!" proceeded Laffemas, looking down with a blending of admiration, hatred and adoration thrilling to see, at Marion who, seeing that the Lord of Nangis had been paralysed in his offer to rescue by the announcement of the title, cast herself on her knees to the arbiter of this issue.

"Show mercy to him as you expect mercy from above!" she said in a lamentable voice.

"She, at his feet!" cried Brichanteau, furiously.

"You are right, sir! I ought to be at hers!" responded the judge with his labored gallantry.

"Remember that there is a Judge above who may be pitiless to you if you harden your heart to me now!" she pursued.

"Marion in the dust! the world is reversed," muttered Saverny. "But how she loves that man! to humble herself like this, to that caittiff—how she loves him, as never a man before!"

Laffemas had replied to the pious appeal by a contemptuous gesture; at the same moment, the priest in the chapel intoned the Psalm: "*Dixit insipiens*—the fool has said there is no God!"

Several of the country lords crossed themselves, but the Lieutenant laughed harshly.

"Of a verity, it is a fine sermon you preach, lady fair! the more remarkable as a sermon is not what we are accustomed to hear from those ruby lips! But cease to preach, and return you to your realm, queen of fashion and social charms! reign over the balls, the dainty suppers and the festivals! For you, what would not I—any gentleman, do?—but the King's proclamation, Laws-a-mercy! the fellow killed a noble in a duel against the express prohibition—he is an outlaw and I might have him strung up to the next tree!"

A shudder of horror ran through the two opposing ranks.

"I never believed in the *wehr-wolf* till now," said Mondori, reckless if he were overheard, "but this monster is no human being, albeit he appeareth and discourseth in broad day!"

"Give the word," said Brichanteau to Nangis, "give me the word, uncle, and, though I incur the gallows myself, I will lead on our friends and hirelings to rescue that gentleman!"

"Marie," said Didier, participating in the

general disgust, "rise! do not sue to that thing of wig and sables!"

Trembling in every limb, the poor woman stood up.

"Liar!" said Didier to Laffemas who receded at his outburst, "it was not a murder—it was a fair duel."

"I was a witness to that fairness!" said Brichanteau. "Captain," continued he to the arquebusier, "let the gallant fellow have a deer's law—let him run—give him a chance to escape or at least to die shot—like a gentleman!"

"Peace!" said Laffemas angrily. "Do you allow rebellion to be counselled in the King's domain?" he asked Nangis, who had become palsied and irresolute after his first spell of excitement. "It is written that blood calls for blood! I am afflicted by such rigor, but it is down in the law-books, so! He slew a man—a noble—the young Marquis of Saverny, and it is not here, where his body passed over the ground, and haply sprinkled it with his precious blood, that leniency should be advised or practised! Gentlemen," proceeded he, taking the increasing assemblage into his confidence with flippancy which jarred on all ears, "he slew the nephew of this worthy old hero! a perfect young gentleman! If he had not been done to death, as my heart is not rock, I—I—I—"

"He whom all believe dead," said Saverny advancing up to the speaker who thought he was about to cuff him, and stood on guard, "is not dead in the slightest, thank St. Nazaire!"

He plucked off the false mustaches and chin-beard which came away together, and removed hat and sham scar with the wig.

All the people of the neighborhood and cas-

tle applauded, as at a miracle, the re-appearance of the young heir to Nangis.

"Nazaire de Saverny!" exclaimed Laffemas, in the midst of the general amaze, "but—but—unless this is a prodigy! is not his bier yonder—are not the clergy chanting the prayers over—"

"Over an empty shell!" said Brichanteau. "It was a deception to baffle your bandogs! He is alive. Do you not know your own, uncle?"

Like one aroused from a bad dream, glad that the terror had vanished, Nangis rushed forward and sank into Saverny's arms, mumbling:

"God be praised! my nephew—my dear Nazaire! my beloved heir!"

While they were embracing strenuously and affectionately, Marion dropped on her knees, with her face turned this time towards the cross on the chapel roof, thanking a just heaven that her beloved was saved.

Didier bowed to Saverny and said with appalling coldness:

"Why have you returned when I wished to be where you were thought to be? I wished to die!"

"God forbid!" cried Marion; "why does he wish to die?"

"You have done me a poor kindness, my lord, to make me owe life to you," resumed the prisoner, to the surprise of Laffemas; "do you believe, otherwise, that I would have let this spider catch me in his web—not fly that I might be but a wasp that—you know—stings sharply. Bah! death is the sole thing for which I have a desire!"

"What does he say?" interposed Marion.

"Nay, nay, grace having fallen from the skies, you will live on!"

"Stop, stop!" said the Lieutenant, "all is not over! Is it a fact that we see before us the Marquis de Saverny?"

"He is crazy! why, gentlemen, he knew the lord at Paris!" said Brichanteau.

"Is this really the young lord?" persisted Laffemas.

"Look at the old nobleman who smiles through his grief!" said Marion, with a sad triumph. "Can you doubt the truth while beholding this happy reunion?"

"Is this he?" stammered the old lord, "is it my son, my nephew, my heir—my dear Nazaire! my soul—my own flesh-and-blood? as well deny the goodness of the All-merciful! Did the lady ask if this were my nephew?"

"My lord, do you in so many words affirm that this is your nephew the Marquis Nazaire de Saverny?" obstinately repeated the Cardinal's protégé.

"Indeed, it is!" responded Nangis with force.

"After this avowal," said Laffemas, unable to repress his exultation, "in the King's name, I arrest you, Lord Saverny! hand me your sword!"

"Oh, my poor boy!" gasped the marquis to whom such a succession of strong emotions was rending.

"Heaven have pity!" ejaculated Marion, almost as much bewildered.

"Ha!" said Didier, "you take still another head! You will justify your sanguinary office, sir, by returning to this Roman Cardinal of yours with a head in each hand!"

"By what right do you arrest my nephew?"

said Nangis, and Brichanteau urged him to the front to challenge the act.

"Ask the Prime Minister for a reckoning," was Laffemas' reply. "Under the ordinance, all survivors of a duel merit death by the halter!"

He held out his hand, with working, clutching fingers for the sword demanded of Saverny.

"You were a fool to disclose yourself!" commented Didier.

Saverny hesitated, but at a sign from Laffemas the arquebusier officer came to take the weapon by force, and he drew the blade.

"Take it," said he, as if transferring to a dupe a snake in torpor which might thaw and sting.

"Stay!" interrupted Nangis with renewed vigor, his white hairs seeming to bristle on his brow and his eyes animated with pristine fire. "No one is lord on this estate save Guillaume de Nangis! Sole and alone, I have the right to administer all kinds of justice in this castle! Here, our Sire the King would be merely my guest, mark you! To none but me hand your sword," concluded he to his nephew.

Saverny gladly drew back his sword for which Laffemas was leaning forward, and passed it to Nangis who gestured for his valet to take it.

A low murmur of gratification ran round the ranks of the spectators on seeing the judge's discomfiture.

"On mine honor," said Laffemas, feeling that the voices were counter to him and that his powers might not suffice in the confined place where all was hostile to him, "your claim is based on a very dilapidated feudal right, my lord, but I do not care to afflict you! Let the

Cardinal blame me," he added with a confident smile which alone would have denoted that he believed himself strong by private reasons to obtain his master's indulgence, "but I—"

"You are an infamous scoundrel," said Didier; "act as you will!"

"I submit," went on the Lieutenant-Criminal. "Put out your matches," he said to his guards, "you are among friends! All I ask of your lordship is a stronghold where I may detain the prisoners until we hear from Paris?"

"Your fathers," said the Lord of Nangis proudly to those about him, "were vassals of mine—I forbid you to help this officer."

"Ha! do you take it thus!" cried Laffemas in a loud voice, assuming as much dignity as possible; "then, lords, squires and serving-men, listen to me! I am Lord Lieutenant of the Criminal Police! a judge wherever I sit! The agent of the Prime Minister, my Lord Cardinal-Duke! I order that those two culprits shall be conducted to safe ward! The castle warders may double my own watch, but you will answer over all, since this is Nangis Castle and not the King's fort. It will be a rash and eke a bold man who traverses my command, for if, when I bid one of ye go here or there and do as told, he so much as wavers—then, his head is at stake—and on the stake within the hour!"

Daunted, for the might of the great Minister was talked of in the remotest province, remembering that by exceptional favor alone Nangis Castle had not been demolished, the castle guards paired off with the arquebusiers, and their officer arranged for the incarceration of the two captives.

"All is lost!" moaned Marion. "Oh, lord, if

you had a heart," she began to Laffemas as Didier was led away without a glance for her.

"When you come to me," responded the judge in a low tone, "I will tell you what is in the heart, which you doubt, affecting you!"

The woman trembled; in that shadowy soul were depths out of which might come lightnings terrible to contemplate and more terrible in their effects.

But her mind reverted to her beloved one, who had left her and now disappeared under the castle portcullis, without a glance of farewell at that supreme moment.

Saverny took it all less seriously.

Brichanteau accompanied him to his prison cell, which, however, was being furnished to make him at ease.

"I daresay," said he jestingly, "the fellow will receive double payment for two heads!"

Enrapt in his business, unaware of what had happened, the undertaker threaded his way through the crowd breaking up, balked of the funeral and full of intelligence to bear homeward.

"Will no one tell me," faltered he, looking in all quarters, "what hour of what day is fixed for the burial of the late Marquis of Saverny?"

"Man from the tomb," replied Laffemas with an indecent laugh, "return in a month for the answer!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE COUNTERPLOT.

Laffemas waited vainly for the suggested visit of Mademoiselle Delorme.

To kill the time, he went over the day's events and those leading up to it with Cheret, who clung to his fortunes and hoped that behind this bulwark he might defy Father Joseph whom he detested for having discharged him.

The new Chief of Police was in an execrable ill-humor as the minutes dragged and the castle clock marked the quarters.

"While we are detained here," said he suddenly, looking up from an easy chair in the rooms which the new steward had found for him, with terror if not with zeal, "that demon of a Capuchin will have sped to the ear of the Cardinal and we shall be undermined!"

"Richelieu loves bloodshed—he will not rescind the sentence—"

But his collocutor dreaded all that the Grey Robe might cover. He was still sure that his pseudo grandam had not revealed anything incriminating him—but all his wariness might yet have failed: a clue might point to him as her destroyer.

"I will go to Paris," said he, "leaving you to watch that this Didier does not again escape."

He paced the room, flapping a sheet of paper, and reminding the secretary of a tiger lashing himself with his tail, in sullen fury.

He listened at the door but, as by tacit agreement, that part of the castle set aside to the

usurping Lieutenant was as though under a ban.

Cheret spoke in a soft voice in the silence under which his employer chafed.

"You asked me at what Father Joseph was aiming?"

"Did I? when?" said the judge distractedly.

"It is your thought. I read thoughts of my superiors. It saves time to anticipate."

"Well," returned Laffemas, with affected resignation, seating himself, with a sigh from a heated bosom. "At what is the arch-plotter aiming, pray?"

"My lord, I am confidant that Father Carré, in his too frequent journeys to Rome, carried correspondence for the Grey Robe as well as for the Red One!"

"What does the restless monk require since doubtless he has the hat?"

"For one thing, he espouses the candidature of the Bishop of Autun instead of him of Arles and, your lordship will see, Autun will have the next cardinalship."

"It is indifferent to me!"

"But why does he scheme for this advancement?"

"I do not even try to guess."

"Because it conciliates the numerous Italian relatives of his Grace of Autun. Father Joseph is plotting for reign on a loftier throne than that of France—"

"Would Richelieu be Pope?" exclaimed Laffemas, with joy, seeing a new career for him in Rome, where a man of his qualities as *bravo* and *sbirro* might expect a fortune.

Cheret shook his head, vexed at having kindled a hope where he had expected to excite dismay.

"The gout nails him to France," was his reply. "It is Father Joseph who has the aspiration."

"Impossible!"

"Ah, you little value Joseph du Tremblay," said the secretary with admiration wrung from him. "Look at his position: his brother, as Governor of the Bastille, controls the liberties of half the nobles and all Parisians under its guns. He himself rather commands the army of Cardinalistic spies than his master; it is he through whom all secrets filter—and God only knows how clearly he lets them soak through! private and political, he knows all the secrets of all Frenchmen, high and low! Often has he astonished the wisest by his wide familiarity to the minutest detail with some scandal believed inscrutably veiled in the past! The King dreads him, Prince Gaston starts at his name, the Court bow to him with awe and even the caustic Langelv forbears to spew his venom upon him."

"Hist!"

"I heard nothing!"

"No, it is the rising wind in the tapestry. An owlet fluttering by. Father Joseph, Pope! I confess I cannot see that."

"Live to see that, my lord, and you will perchance be lying in the dungeon awaiting death, like those two young gentlemen."

Cheret spoke very calmly but with earnestness impressing Laffemas, who ceased to listen at the door.

"Does he hate me so?"

"Certes! Who but you ever came between him and the Duke who was his pupil, and for whom he has a jealous love?"

"That is true! I believe I am the only per-

son to whom a private audience has been given, while the Cardinal's Chief Confessor was kept at the door," said the officer of justice, with pride.

Ten o'clock struck.

"Ten!" said Laffemas, disgusted. "She will not come!"

"Hark!" said the secretary, rising.

"It is—no, a man's heavy step—with spurs on!" said the other, sinking back in his chair, disappointed.

The arquebusier captain entered, with a kind of contempt for the two men of the quill, whose orders he was compelled to receive. But he qualified his submission by spiteful inuendoes.

His deep-lined features were twisted into a smile which he did not care to mask.

"Another escape!" ejaculated Laffemas, bounding forward, not ignorant of this officer's contrary humor.

"My prisoners? No, my lord—I am not like those sleepy warders at Blois—I do not let my wards escape."

"But some bird has flown?"

"You are right! The master of the castle has set out for Paris—"

"The Marquis of Nangis travels, at his age?"

"Yes, my lord; but he will not need to go so far! The King is at Chambord!"

"The King! He seeks the King?"

"Who comes, *via* Chambord, to see the double execution at Blois?" Cheret hastened to suggest.

"I do not know what he is there for, but my orderly rode over country with the news for me. On the road he met the old marquis hurrying, no doubt, to procure his nephew's

pardon of the King, and who do you think was in the old coach with him?"

This was evidently the bolt which the irate captain withheld to do the most hurt.

"Marion!" cried Laffemas, reading truly how much the man meant to wound him and how surely he had gauged the injury.

"Mdlle. Delorme was with the ancient spark! She goes to plead for her gallant, as the nobleman for his relative and heir."

Laffemas and Cheret looked at each other, disconcerted.

"Any orders?" said the captain, as if that was all that had brought him.

"I will act on my previous inspiration," said the judge to his confidant. "I will go to Chambord or the city to contravene this double machination! Yes, captain, an escort and a light carriage, if such a one is procurable! If not," with a grimace, "I must take to the saddle."

While the officer went to fulfil the command, Laffemas instructed his secretary to keep supervision over the two captives.

"You are sure that Joseph intends to procure the election to the Pontificate?" he demanded, frowning.

"That much I worked out from the fragment of the cipher correspondence which Carré bore."

"Then, let him beware how he thrusts bars in my wheels! The Italians are vengeful—they are determined that a foreigner shall never rule in the States of the Church! Father Joseph, or his French nominee, is doomed!"

In an hour, he was seated in a comparatively light vehicle which rolled over the rugged road, surrounded by the arquebusiers, delighted to

be on the return and bewailing the sad fate of their comrades remaining to supplement the castle guard over the two duellists.

In the meanwhile, Lord Nangis, accompanied by Marion, as stated, was well on the same way.

The old noble seemed given a new life by the inevitable choice of his personal inter-mediation with the Crown to save his nephew. On his way to the stable to see to the preparation of a carriage, co-eval with the litters with which Catherine de Medicis travelled to Paris, he passed Marion, and the sight of her sorrowful face doubled his own woe.

The same grief made a man of him, without the trappings of aristocracy. He went to her, took her hand and said, in his low voice:

"Come with me, since your mission is like mine—to sue for a young life! both may be useful to our country in the troublous times which I foresee when such rulers guide France! a priest and a force of spies! Cease to weep, lady! The King, to whom I haste, will grant pardon! It is a right of his position, and a duty of his race toward a Nangis. Be tranquil, sore heart! In his blood, as in name, he is the true son of Henry the Fourth, I avouch!"

Marion smiled slightly through her gloom. She knew Louis XIII. better than this old courtier, long absent from the court.

"You were companion of his sire?" said she, not to speak her thought, which was adverse to the enthusiasm making this white-headed man juvenile.

"For his father, indeed, I wore out many an iron coat as the nephew whom I seek to save wears out satin doublets for the son! I assure you, lady, that I will have merely to show him

my frosty pow, and plead to him in the name of his father's patron: 'St. Gris!' and he will annul the sentence—forgive the little harm—since no one was slain—and reinstate my nephew in his favor."

"Richelieu—" began Marion.

"Let Richelieu find a saint more potent to oppose to his King's father's!"

On the road, at a turning, a lugubrious song, but a little heightened by a slight tone of triumph, seemed to hail the equipage.

"A psalm!" said the marquis, leaning out of the small glass window, "ill omen!"

"The priests, my lord," said the coachman, controlling his four horses which the chant had startled, as well as had a lantern on a pole amid a small group of men in white and black. "They were disappointed of singing their ballads over the young lord, so they vent them on the bats and hedge-sparrows!"

"*Quid gloriaris?*" repeated Marion. "My lord, as you knew Queen Marguerite of Navarre, and she spoke Latin better than I fear me I speak French, pray interpret—what is the meaning of that psalm?"

Nangis was indeed one of the bevy of sparks and beauties who surrounded the author of the "Heptameron." He smiled at the reminiscence and answered with lightness:

"I was wrong! This is rather of good omen! That is the utterance of King David, denouncing the tyrants who boast of doing injustice! promising them death and destruction, and to those who trust in the Lord tender mercy! Lady, we are on the true road!"

Toward morning, the strength of the old man giving out and forcing them to stop at an inn, they were gratified with the tidings, by the

post rider, that the King, as though to meet them, had left the town palace and was at Chambord.

Nangis was glad, all the more as he heard that the noble in charge of the transfer was an old companion-in-arms, the Duke of Bellegarde.

"Our suit is won!" said he, rising in the morning with renewed vivacity and insisting on Marion taking breakfast with him.

He was very dull for it was foggy, and threatened rain.

It is true that she had the tact, ingenious in charm as she was, not to talk of her lover but of the Marquis of Saverny, whose adventures in Paris she detailed with such art that the fond dotard began to believe that his heir would be a loss not sheerly to France, but to Europe! All that Laffemas had plastered with praise, was richly gilded and burnished.

They resumed their drive, cheerful, like father and adopted daughter.

The servants, who were numerous, participated in the old lord's gaiety, and the coachman so tickled his horses that they bounded along with vigor like that in the Court of the White Horse, in other words, the bronze of Marcus Aurelius, cast in Rome and adorning Paris, at this epoch.

In this same mood, unlike that befitting those on the thorns concerning the fate of the heir to Nangis and the companion in his misery—heir to Suffering, the party of solicitors arrived at the palace of Prince Gaston.

The latter had fled, to use the right word, on hearing that his brother was coming to Blois, and had offered his château to cover this flight.

Always conspiring, as more than once has

been said, he detested being questioned, although to lie artfully was his second nature.

Nangis had not been misinformed: his friend the Duke of Bellegarde, was the Grand Master of the Ceremonies. As a familiar of Gaston, he knew the castle perfectly, and he strove by his deference and celerity in removing obstacles to his royal master's repose, to efface the charge of his having sought to dethrone him in his brother's favor.

The marquis, who had ever on his mind the sordid and modest attire of the companions of the ever-poor King of Navarre, was stupefied by the splendor of the Guard Hall, where Bellegarde was marshalling the servants and welcoming the country gentlemen, hastening to pay their respects to the new comer, all the more readily as they, like the duke, wished not to be confounded with the latest plot of the Lord of Orleans.

They bowed curiously but respectfully to the old noble on learning that he was Saverny's uncle, hero of the now historical duel.

But the marquis gazed with dazed eyes on the scene: the large hall was crowded with the courtiers and officers of the household—At the door stood the musketeers, with their guns on their shoulders; in the lobbies patrolled the Hundred Swiss Guards—Richelieu not having yet obliterated all the foreigners; glorious in their Velasquez-like uniform, their doublets heavy with old gold, their breeches red, their stockings in several clashing hues, and their long swords replaced within doors by gold-headed canes; officers of the escort—an army! threaded the throng, light-guardsmen, the Queen's guards, the Cardinal's, the French, the Swiss Reds, the Outer-guards; haughtily,

the Gentlemen A-Bec-de-Corbin, so called from their peculiarly headed sticks of office, paraded in heavily laced breeches over scarlet hose, black silk vests with purple trimmings, and red plumes in broad-brimmed felt hats.

Bellegarde eclipsed them all, having donned a sumptuous court suit so heavy with gold lace as to fatigue him as in his young days did the half-armor, while his chest was oppressed with the plaques of orders, over which crossed the ribbon of the Golden Fleece.

Nangis, in his mourning suit, seemed a blot on the glorious assemblage, but this led to the duke singling him out from the host of suppliants and recognising him.

He ran to him with the parade step, and refusing the proffered hand, embraced his former brother-in-arms, the two white heads commingling their locks like patriarchs' while mumbling those effusive compliments which were in vogue.

What a contrast: the aged men who had begun life under the solitary and spurned banner of the humble King of Navarre, and parted after the campaigns, arduous and perilous to meet in the palace, one bowed with grief and loneliness, the other resplendent with court favor.

On seeing the attention the meeting occasioned among the gilded lookers-on, Bellegarde colored up, recognising that his friend's garments were of a rustic and obsolete cut.

Scarcely listening to the explanation of the visitor's business, the duke hurried him to a side door, muttering something about sparing him the jeers of the idle spectators.

"Mock at a greybeard's mourning?" protested Nangis.

"Oh, these young bloods are such frivolous youth! But you can judge of them by your precious nephew!"

He placed him in the lobby and hastily added:

"Naturally, you shall have your audience. You will impress the sovereign deeply as he is prone to accord any request to his father's associates. That viper Laffemas, I believe, owes his promotions, wonderful in number and in height, to his being son of that Jean Laffemas, you will recall, valet to the Prince of Bearn? Rumor that he is offspring of the Prime Minister?—tut! scandal! But stay here, brother, while I prepare the King for your plaint. I will set him against this Cardinal who never tires to cast down the noble and degrade us. Let the signal be my tapping with my foot—so!"

Nangis caught his hand and wrung it with vigor, saying:

"Heaven repay you!"

At the end of the lobby was a gilded door, before which a royal musketeer was marching.

The duke knew his name, for they were all gentlemen in that special corps, and accosting him courteously, inquired if the King were by himself.

It appeared that with him was an official in black allowed "a kissing of hands," in thanks for some appointment, who was offering the monarch a paper to sign.

"An order on the Treasury?" laughed Bellegarde.

"More like a death-warrant, judging by the man's looks, bearing a certain likeness with M. de Laffemas, Master of Requests, who, how-

ever, I hear, has been drowned in a ditch in Brittany!"

The news of Laffemas' ducking at Nangis had reached court, but as usual, with court gossip, much perverted.

The duke returned to his friend.

"As soon as the King is at liberty, I will introduce you," he said. "Courage!" and he left him admiring, with a listless eye, the ceiling decorations by Primaticcio.

How was it Nangis had quitted the genial, sympathetic travelling companion who had accompanied him to the Paris custom bars?

Marion, on approaching her own realm, had reflected on her attire. The Spanish costume with which Mondori had furnished her, might excite the lauds of a Saverny, or the rustics', but it would not pass in the capital, and far less smooth her way to a hearing of the ruler.

Luckily, she recalled, in Blois, a costumier's who did a little business during the festive times when the Duke of Orleans held court there; this was an old actress who readily supplied her need. She appeared at the palace, therefore, in a suit of weeds, somewhat theatrical, but very imposing, a little antedating yet much as would be costumed "The Mourning Bride."

This beauteous and piteous figure, recalling the Dido of marble in the gallery, entered the château without difficulty and penetrated to the quarters set apart for the Majesty.

But here, having no usher, as had Nangis, to remove impediments, a halberdier rudely lowered his spear and barred her passage, saying, in a voice to correspond with his act.

"No admittance! The Royal Presence is within!"

Marion drew herself up with disdain, like one surprised at being refused the right of entry.

"Sir, do they now couch lances at ladies here! Whilom, they used to be placed in rest, in their honor!"

The musketeer whom Bellegarde had addressed, was relieved and came out at this scene into the hall.

Marion called him by name:

"M. de Navaille," said she firmly, "I want instant speech with the Head of the Royal Household!"

Navaille had recognised a court lady by the wit in her reproach to the guardsman and now he knew the beauty again. He bowed, with a sweep along the floor of the plumes in his doffed hat and replied:

"To be sure, madam! You can go into the ante-room! Let pass!" continued he to the halberdier.

The latter lifted his lance, grumbling:

"Oh, a lady for the duke! Why did he not say so? Well, these old relics are more often kissed than the new ones, i' faith! I will wager that King Harry was too wary to post him as sentry at the Louvre gates when he had an appointment with a lady as lovely as this one!"

In the meanwhile, the audience of his Majesty with his new Lieutenant-Criminal taking up some time, for Laffemas did not forget to deliver his budget of news about Brittany, including the movements of Prince Gaston who had gone to Nantes, as with a view to keep up connection with England—Bellegarde had removed his old friend to a side room where he had refreshment supplied him. On his return into the waiting-room, he found it half

filled with privileged personages, discussing the news while awaiting turns to see the King.

Like a hornet among butterflies and moths, flitted the Abbé of Nôtre Dame, the Archbishop's coadjutor, Gondi, with malignant remarks. As if to vie with him in this darting of spiteful shafts, Jester Langely, who had not seen his master since overnight, shot his shuttle of dry mirth to and fro on the flimsy warp.

"The Bishop of Autun gets the new cardinal's hat!" said one.

"He won it at the 'holy Siege'—of La Rochelle," said Gondi, "where he commanded the artillery."

"I approve the *Holy Siege* of Rome hailing him," said Langely; "it will be one cardinal made according to the *canons*!"

It was into this throng that Laffemas thrust himself, overjoyed at the King approving of his appointment and conduct of Didier and Saverny's capture, to say nothing of giving the death-warrant of the pair, fully signed and sealed.

The court nobles feigned not to know him and those attached to the castle were ignorant of his powers.

Langely enlightened them, through the first inquirer.

"This man in black with trimmings of ermine? Oh, he is not one of the followers of the Duke of Orleans, or he would be less arrogant under this roof whence his master has fled, fearful of losing his night's sleep for a prolonged one! This ape, with the airs of a grandee of Spain, is just Sire de Laffemas, Intendant of Champagne, now Lieutenant-Criminal!"

"An Infernal Lieutenant!" whispered Belle-

garde right and left, "they call him in town the Cardinal's Executioner—now, he had become the King's—save the mark!"

"What a man to be at court!" said a country squire.

"What marvel? A tiger in our menagerie!" cried Langely, facing the frown of Laffemas with composure, for the other had turned suspecting he was the object of the raillery. "Better stroke him the right way of the fur! be his friend! Unless he take you by the hand, he may take you by the neck!"

Going up to Laffemas, from whom the aristocratic mob was falling coldly aloof, he caught him by the sleeve and drew him toward the Master of the Household.

"My Lord of Bellegarde," said he, in a voice so artfully mingling scorn and politeness that even Laffemas was duped: "allow me to present the son of your old King's valet—Laffemas, fresh from kissing of the royal hands on taking his appointment as Chief of the Police of the Kingdoms!"

Laffemas bowed.

Bellegarde stood on such delicate ground, for he best knew how deeply he had compromised himself for the Orleans party, that he received Langely's hint with wisdom, if not rapture.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance," said he, smiling blandly.

All the others flocked around the Chief Officer of Justice, at this cue.

The duke turned aside to mask his chagrin, muttering:

"Death of my life! to what baseness have we fallen? Oh, to see the son a valet, too, carrying the fasces with which his father was chastised!"

In muddy boots and tattered doublet, though of buff leather, to show his haste, the Master of the Wolfhounds entered the lobby.

"The Count of Charnace!" said Bellegarde. "Master of the Hunt! Well, count, what prospects of sport?"

"Poor!" said the Huntsman, shaking his velvet-capped head. "I had hopes of some wolves, for a report reached me that they had eaten a peasant or two in the forest! But I have not lighted on their trail."

"We are luckier!" said Langely, pointing with his elbow to Laffemas. "We have a wolf in our midst!"

"Thou buffoon!" said Charnace, "can you not promise us something more gay?"

"Yes," said Langely, who had dextrously caught a glimpse of the writing on the scroll Laffemas was flourishing and to which dangled the seal of State in blood-red wax. "There will be some sport at Reuil, where a couple of gentlemen will be hanged for fighting a duel against the royal Edict!"

"Do you know that?" stammered Laffemas, rolling up the scroll smartly.

"What does not our dear Langely know?" said Bellegarde, who feared less the man who appeased Louis XIII.'s appetite for cruelty than he who made him laugh once in a while.

"Know it!" said Langely, recalling all he had seen at Blois, "it is I who ought to be appointed Head of the Police, if I would exchange the rod for my bauble! For know ye, that the culprits are the Marquis of Savigny and a gentleman of Blois named Didier!"

The words fell here on dull ears in silence, but to the right and left of the waiting-room sounded cries: On the left, over his sherry

and cakes, the Marquis of Nangis had heard his nephew's name, and in the side piece to the right, Marion, freshly introduced, was appalled by the syllables of Didier's.

"Hush!" said Bellegarde, with unwonted tenderness. "It is his fond old uncle hears you, there!"

"Come to sue the King for the life I hold," muttered Laffemas, plunging the warrant into the folds of his mantle as if it might be wrested from him.

A young nobleman had peered through the Venetian glass at the side where the second exclamation had been heard.

"A woman! young—fainted—coming to," he said; "by the light of heaven, it is Marion Delorme! Returned to court! Marion, gentlemen!" Laffemas recovered his breath.

"Marion, under the same roof as Louis the Chaste! come to sue for her lover's life!" jeered he.

"Dog!" said Bellegarde in an undertone, "already he snaps at the hand which lifted him out of the kennel! He will die no good end!"

"Amen!" said Langely, overhearing. "Sue the King for the life of a man! Marion is not yet accredited with my fool's cap! Marion, my Lord Lieutenant," continued he, raising his voice so as to be heard in the adjoining room, "Marion will rather appeal to the Cardinal!"

"The King receives!" called out an usher, opening a door, and saluting the Duke of Bellegarde, who advanced to take the royal orders as to the introduction of the suppliants, petitioners and well-wishers.

In a moment or two all was order in the ante-room, all stillness.

Laffemas trembled at the jester's advice.

He sidled through the courtiers, who paid no more attention to him, and reached the door of the side-room where Marion, who had aroused herself, was near the threshold. She paused in horror at sight of one whom she had hoped far away.

He flaunted the warrant under her eyes and pointed to the King's signature.

One glance sufficed her; she hid her convulsed features in her white hands.

All the occupants of the waiting-room were staring at the inner doorway to behold the monarch.

Laffemas and the lady were practically alone.

"I will exchange this for a wedding-contract," hissed the Lieutenant-Criminal.

She started out of her consternation, and his eyes catching hers, they gazed at each other, enwrought—his had the fascination of a basilisk's.

"Avaunt, Satan!" said she. "The King can cancel what he writes!"

"The King!" repeated Laffemas, with indecent disdain so near the sovereign; "try to get the good will of the King—and, meanwhile, beware that you lose not mine!"

"I will try the King," said she solemnly, "and that failing, the—"

"The Cardinal?" queried Laffemas, remembering the fool's hint and speaking with self-confidence, more firm than before.

"No, sir! The King of Kings!"

The officer of justice uttered a low and impious laugh and retired with a smile of self-satisfaction and triumph, while an usher came to lead Marion and the Marquis of Nangis into the presence of Louis the Thirteenth, "Chaste and Just."

CHAPTER XXX.

UNHAPPY AS A KING.

When Bellegarde entered the room where the King prepared to meet his morning's callers, the duke found him sitting, almost huddled up, in a capacious arm-chair, sighing deeply, a habit of his.

He showed in every trait of the pallid, long-drawn countenance traces of that languor which was to carry him off. His long hair was black as the suit of velvet and silk, trimmed with dead silver and burnt mother-of-pearl buttons, which tightly clad his attenuated figure. His sight was already so failing that he thought to renounce outdoor pursuits in favor of the hundred petty arts—bird-traps, improvements in fire-arms, designs in coins, and a little dabbling with cookery, to say nothing of painting, poetising, and composing ballet music—which caused the satirical epitaph to be written upon this unworthy son of Henry of Navarre:

“Here lies a master who had not
One master gift or grace;
Although a hundred virtues his,
Which high a varlet place!”

Two or three leather coffers had been unpacked, and from them had been transferred to the dressers and a table by his pointed elbow, books about fowling, shooting, hounds, falconry, with musical instruments and some

of the toys of his own making. Nevertheless, feeling that he was a delinquent from his recent contact with Prince Gaston, Bellegarde hardly looked, as he profoundly bowed, at the high forehead, antique profile and aquiline nose of the Bourbons, which still imposed on the impressionable.

"I have had a bad night's rest, Bellegarde," said the King, between a yawn and a sigh.

The duke was relieved by the triviality of the remark.

"My lord, nobody rests in these anxious times!" said he.

"You are right, duke! The State is rolling at a terrific rate toward an unfathomable gulf!"

"Oh, nay, sire! What harm can befall while it is guided by a strong and sure hand—"

The King darted a sharp glance at the courtier who did not wince and said quickly:

"Yes, the Cardinal bears a weighty charge!"

He did not make disguise over the little place he held in the actual government, no more than when, as a child, his Regency fell upon his mother the Medicis.

"I should like to relieve his aged hands of the duty," continued the monarch, plucking the stubble of his chin-beard, which had been shaved, as we know, and which growth irritated him like a young bird by pin-feathers. "Albeit, in truth, I have all my work to do to exist, without the additional pain of reigning!"

The courtier did not count the sighs which accentuated the distressful sentences.

"Why, sire, one may not call the Cardinal-duke old!" said Bellegarde, who, like most old men, resented criticisms on age.

Louis looked round the room, frowning not

from ire but from short-sightedness, and said:

"No one is here to listen and peep—"

Bellegarde made a fierce gesture, with his hand to his side, as to draw a sword and explore the arras.

"So, answer me frankly, as becomes an old servitor of my father: What is your opinion—"

"Of whom, sire?"

"Of him!" as if there were only one man in the kingdom to be considered.

"Of his Eminence?"

Louis nodded, testily, as if his time was reckoned.

"It is with difficulty that one's dazzled sight takes cognisance," faltered the peer.

"Pshaw! Is this your soldierly frankness!" He examined the room again, from the deep bay of the windows to the folds of tapestry, as if to perceive a mailed foot at the base of them. "Yet we have no monks in these walls, neither grey nor red! No spies, I trust. What do you fear, duke and peer, marshal and minister, that you will not speak out? The King is desiring your open opinion on the Prime Minister!"

"If a perfectly open answer is required—"

"Utterly open, duke!"

And the King leaned forward in the chair, leaning his weight alternately on one foot and the other, after the peculiarity of his race.

"Then, you have in him a great man," rejoined the duke boldly, which was the more lofty in him as he was not without misgiving that Richelieu would yet exile him or disgrace him as he had Luynes, Epernon or those sons of "the Fair Gabrielle," whom he had induced

the King not to forgive, although they were his half-brothers.

"I wish you would assure them so, at Rome! They might make him the next Pope!" said the King, not with whole satire. "Mark you, between the prince doing nothing and the statesman doing all, the realm is in tribulation!"

"Um!" mumbled the duke, who could not understand why he was taken into confidence.

"Is he not the regulator of all things," proceeded the King, who had these moments of unbosoming himself to his long series of ephemeral favorites, "peace or war, finance and customs? I tell you, lord, that he is the veritable sovereign! It was a piece of his treachery by which the Catholic League was dissolved! He has hard hit the House of Austria, to which my Queen Anna is closest kin, and which, more or less on that account, wished well to me!"

"Nay, nay, sire, did he not establish a rabbit warren for you in the Louvre gardens?"

"Is that my share of the plunder of wars?" He coughed and looked on his handkerchief at what he had wiped off his thin lips, as his physician ordered, to see if he had broken a blood-vessel. "He intrigues with Denmark?"

"I do not know—but he let the Crown fix the value of the silver mark for the goldsmiths!" said Bellegarde, evasively.

"He is prodigal in distributing riches to those that please him!" pursued the other, waxing still more wrathful at being so softly buffeted.

"Sire, he let your Majesty decree by his own hand that edict forbidding citizens to spend more than a crown *per caput* in the wine-shop!"

"Not content to be King he aims to be Pope!"

"He makes war on the Pontifical States," remonstrated Bellegarde. "That is unlike a 'prentice Pontiff!"

"And will profit by some one of those pretty treaties which he arranges in secret!"

He rose and paced the room, unsteadily, tapping the panels with a suspicious hand and slapping the tapestry, from habit.

"I tell you, Richelieu does everything! All requests and petitions flock to him or his creatures—I had a specimen of the tribe this morning—"

"Laffemas?"

"Yes, the Lord Lieutenant! What a high officer of justice! He wrung from me a death-warrant signature—I, who hate to spill blood!"

Bellegarde bowed to conceal a smile, for he had seen, at the Siege of La Rochelle, how proof Louis had been to the yells of Huguenots dying of thirst in a ditch.

"And a blank commission for a governor of a province in our Indies! Who are they going to send there, to extort rupees and diamonds from the rajahs? Another of the Richelieu brood! Ah, all is solid there—while here, the shade of monarchy fades—" smiting his hollow chest. "Is there any one without who would haste to meet me?"

"Those who want to be touched for the King's Evil!" replied the duke, letting his wit get the mastery over him.

But the speaker did not hear, in the increase of his choler.

"I accorded the lieutenancy, but I am disgusted by the voracity of his legion—he wants the collar of the Fleece for a favorite! A new

gallant of his niece, Lady Combalet, I dare say!"

"She leads a fine life, sire! All the rest is calumny!"

"Duke, have you seen him ride forth! with two hundred of his insolent red and brilliant musketeers on foot to guard him!"

"But he has only a hundred horse!" said the duke.

"Shameful! He is ruin to my temper!"

"Majesty, he saves France!" the nobleman valiantly retorted, seeing with subtlety that the torrent of invectives sought for an obstacle to make it foam.

"It is on my head will fall all the blood! woe is me! *Peccavi!* While he is signing treaties of alliance with Swedish Reformers and fighting against liege sons of the Church, he leaves me to be haunted by the hundreds of headless wretches who lost that casket of the spirit on Execution Place! And all were friends of mine! His purple is dyed by the blood struck from their necks, which my arm, in tender moments, interlaced! He goes out splendid with gold and cardinal-red. I am garbed in mourning and have—look on that board there—to decree that none shall dress in gay colors—so that I shall not walk alone, like the daw among the peacocks!"

"Faith! he does not spare my friends or his own! Remember Saint Preuil!"

"He hates well, yes—"

"And loves those whom he haply loves, with tenderness!"

"He has exiled my mother!"

"And your brother!"

Louis burst into laughter.

"By St. Gris! you are as keen as Langel—
it compensates!"

Bellegarde allowed the echoes of the harsh laugh to die away and said, in a gentle but steady voice:

"Armand de Richelieu is the worthy son of the Captain Duplessis who fought with your sainted sire, my lord, and, faithful, dependable, devoted, he never acts—my word on it! without the belief that he is meeting your wishes! I know not what vast plots are hatching in the Papal City, but rely on this—Richelieu will not abandon Louis to be Spiritual King of the Universe!"

"I hate him!" hissed the other, unmelted by this tribute. "He is a burden on me, an eyesore, a gall in the flank! I might have been a notable prince without this brighter glory at my side, drowning my effulgence! But he will tread too heavily on the lion! he will arouse the dormant monarch! Mighty as is his fame, it is fed on my fuel, mind! All will go into shadow, like the tomb, if I hurl down the pile of wealth which is his pyramid! may be his pyre!"

His single auditor had been under fire of an army, but never had he passed a period of time less pleasantly, more gallingly and with such painful apprehensions. The King would never forget to whom he had uttered these emanations of a gangrened heart. And still they were flung forth!

"Like the ruler, my realm is growing worse in health! But without as within all look to the Minister as the cure-all! Never to the Lord's anointed! How he worries Austria, my ally and my friend! With what calm he has allowed my ships to be captured in the Gulf

of Gascony! He would attach me to Gustavus Adolphus, save the mark! The Most Catholic Majesty after my brother Spain! It is Richelieu that seems the soul of Kingcraft, filling all the country like that loosened imprisoned genius which, emitted as vapor, threatened to overwhelm the scene! My family is ousted—I will be relegated to some corner, soon! Oh, duke, am I not to be pitied?"

Bellegarde refrained from a word. He had retired to the south window, but it was a cheerless sight on which he distractedly gazed, while compelled to listen to the outbreak. The forest was gloomy and grey, for a thick mist rose and began to spit drops which spluttered on the dry leaves, tormented a little by a fitful wind which presaged a heavy rain storm.

Suddenly the duke felt a hot breath on his cheek. The King, finding himself without a hearer, had joined him in the recess.

"Still raining! No hunting to-day!" snarled he, disappointed. "Do you see that rogue stealing along under the beeches? It is a poacher, I engage! There, he has a 'broken' gun—like that I invented; its short barrel, which his rags imperfectly hide, is carried under one arm and the stock under the other! Oh, duke, I envy that poacher's fate! I would exchange mine for it! He can go hunting when he likes! Make a jest of the prince's deer-keepers, and sleep under the oaks if out late! he will sing while the thunder reverberates, and dwell free, like the woodland birds! In his cot, at least, the boor is master! But I am alway to have before my eyes this priest in red, who looks on from afar with gravity and sternness, while his tools come and badger me for my signature to his deeds of blood!

‘Sire, this must be done, for your good pleasure!’ What derision! This man stands before me and the people see only his Red Robe. If anyone asks: ‘What is that moving under that cloak?’ a passer-by will whisper, as of a child at the apron-strings, ‘Hush! it is the King!’”

He returned to the table, leaned on the chair to control his trembling and coughed hectically.

“Who waits without? More bearers of death-sentences? Every day it is a new list, duke! Now Protestant, now duellists! He is not choice as to the kind of head! dissenter or combatant! All is one! Like those Tartars who heap up monuments of skulls to their Khan, or—what does he do with them?”

“It is my time to save a head!” thought Bellegarde, turning and tapping on the waxed oaken boards with his heel.

To the astonishment of the sovereign, who expected only another of the Cardinal’s emissaries, the white-headed Marquis of Nangis, accompanied at a respectful distance by Mdle. Delorme in her black dress, entered the room.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SUIT WHICH FAILED.

Nangis advanced toward the King and sank on one knee with reverence.

His sight was bad; his limbs were wearied; besides, he imagined he saw enough likeness to his ancient master in this son of his to command sorrowful respect.

"What do you seek?" said the King, letting his still puzzled eyes wander from this old noble to the woman who had also knelt, praying, at the doorway.

"Justice, dread Majesty!" said the marquis. "Against whom?"

"Against the sanguinary tyrant Armand Duplessis, whom men hail as your Cardinal-Minister!"

Louis started and glanced toward Bellegarde, who was not surprised at the visitors and must have arranged for their entrance. How singular that this suppliant should strike on the head which he had been belaboring.

"Mercy!" said Marion in a soft voice, in this silent interval.

"For whom do you crave mercy, lady?" inquired the King.

"His name is Didier!"

"And I plead for the Marquis of Saverny," added Nangis.

Louis knit his brows. Those very names were in the document of execution which he had signed for the new Lieutenant-Criminal. So "Didier" and "Saverny" were enemies of

the Minister? What a chance to thwart his foe. Always providing that Richelieu was his foe—perhaps, all things considered, only a bitter friend!

"You, my lord," said Louis, "should be the marquis' uncle, the Lord of Nangis?" The old nobleman bowed, smiling a little at not having been utterly forgotten. "By what right do you sue?" continued the King of the kneeling woman who seemed less to direct her prayers to him than to heaven.

He had not recognised her, having studiously avoided even sating his curiosity as regards the most-talked of woman in his capital, but her beauty was manifest through her sorrow.

"I am his sister," replied Marion, firmly.

Bellegarde hid an impertinent grimace behind his hand.

"Well, uncle and sister, what would you have?"

Nangis pointed to the King's hands and rejoined:

"Justice from this one—mercy from the other! It is all I ask of my two sovereigns, the King of France and the King over high heaven!"

"Plead for us both," whispered Marion, thinking that the old man would touch the monarch more surely.

"My nephew, Nazaire de Saverny, crossed swords with a gentleman of Blois, of uncertain parentage, which was a mistake. Both bore themselves bravely," continued the marquis, looking to see in the royal eye, wan and distraught, such a sparkle as would show that the son of Henry of Navarre liked courage as much as his predecessor. "But there is no meeting-place for men of the sword where the

Minister has not posted spies and myrmidons!"

"I have heard of the combat! under the very lamp which illumined an edict of ours anent duelling! It was bold, rather than brave. Enough of explanations! What would you say to me?" and he frowned and glanced aside at the window, against which a breeze flung some drops of hissing rain.

Nangis rose. In his loneliness, some echo of the popular feeling—that is, the people he associated with—arrived within his castle. He guessed that mercy and justice had failed to win his case, and with the spirit of a wounded lion he determined to put his hand on this opportunity and say in the royal presence what most of his brethren in Brittany thought.

"I have to say that it is high time that your Majesty reflected over matters."

Bellegarde made sign upon sign to stay this speech at the outset, but the Bretons are wilful.

"The Cardinal-Duke cherishes mischievous projects," proceeded Nangis, gathering strength as he went on; "he drinks the blood of your subjects!"

Louis started; he had twinges of remorse for having let favorites of his meet the axe, without too much combating their doom.

"Not thus would your father Henry, of right regal memory, have surrendered his loyal servitors! He never struck a blow without having narrowly inspected where it would fall. Guarded closely by that peerage, it was guarded fondly by him. He knew that men of the sword should not be dealt with by the man of the axe and halter! Such heads should not be wantonly stricken off, but reserved to face the blast of war! He knew all about this, as

more than one bullet had scathed the white plumes over his brow!"

Bellegarde gnawed his lace ruffles; Louis had been at the La Rochelle investment, but all the while he longed and chafed to return to his amusements and frivolous occupations at Paris. It was only in actual fighting that his paternal courage revived in him.

"Those times were the good ones," pursued the noble, smiling, as to old friends, at some portraits of his contemporaries. "I belong there, and I honor them! Never durst a prelate lift a finger against a peer! Then, the head under the coronet would have been a costly bargain!

"Sire, in these evil times—take an old gentleman's word on it! keep a few true nobles about your person! Some of these days, peradventure, your Grace may have need of them! In those days, alas! you may bewail the Execution-place having been so well attended to see those lords of approved bravery, to whom the rising youth turned envious glances, dying long before they were aged!

"The embers are yet warm of the civil wars, and there is an echo of yester-eve's tocsin on the air!"

Louis shuddered. He imagined that, in their cowls and frocks, Clément and Ravailac were ringing a knell for him as for his foregoers.

"Be less lavish of the sword-play of the executioner—it is he whose blade should be sealed up in the scabbard, not ours! The worst use you can put the planks to of our noble old oaks is to build scaffolds and gibbets! In their chains, haply, a skeleton is dangling which was a man of valiant heart, who will be mourned for, one day to come!"

Marion sobbed loudly and the duke, in despair, knew not what unlucky star to curse which had caused him to befriend this inexhaustible fount of the complaints of the realm.

"Sire, blood is not a blessed dew—it does not fall from heaven but only from the scaffold! nothing good will grow on the Execution Place! If you people the heights of Monfaucon with the hanged, the populace will flock there to pay derisive court, or genuine adoration, while shunning the windows that look out of the Louvre Palace!

"If the dying voice of the courtiers must enliven you, while they are being put to death, let them go! but loud as may be the flatterer's chants, saying 'All is well, and that you are a Bourbon and son of Henry the Great!' still their clamor will not drown the sound of a human head dropping on the boards! My advice is, do not play at such a game!

"King, who must one day go before the King of Kings, I tell you that a duel is better than an execution; that there is no joy and honor in that kingdom where the deathsman is busier than the soldier; that a hard pastorate is France where the priest receives his tithe in heads! that the statesman, who is mostly illustrious among the inhuman, has blood on those hands with which he lifts your sceptre!"

The King kept his true sentiments veiled as much as possible. He did not display the irritation Bellegarde expected but, eyeing the latter with a sidelong glance, replied with emphasis:

"My Lord Cardinal is my friend! Who loves me, should love him!"

"That is a hint for me, I suppose," muttered the duke. "But, woe to me! this Nangis will

never have done! Marion is a pattern courtier to him; she says nought but only weeps—but, at the same time, what eloquence in those tear-quenched diamonds!"

Nangis was indeed about to continue, but the King cried:

"Enough! Richelieu is but another Louis! close this harangue which merely ruffles one's mind! It is such speeches that have made me grey before my time!"

The head of the Thirteenth Louis had indeed showed white while he was yet young.

"May not an old man and a weeping woman speak of a matter of life and death?" persisted the marquis.

"In brief, what do you desire?"

"The pardon of Nazaire, my nephew! a scapegrace, but who nobly surrendered himself, and made himself a scapegoat in the hope to save his adversary!"

"Pardon for Didier, sire!" said Marion in her exquisite voice.

"All that a monarch does to pardon is so much robbery to justice," said the King, coldly.

Nangis had drawn back and went the farther as Bellegarde hastened to take him by the sleeve, reproaching him with furious looks.

Marion rose and threw back her veil, saying, with a tone which finally pierced her sorrow and was by turns coaxing and fervent; but it was lofty and above the earth throughout.

"Your majesty will inevitably have compassion on our grief! And on those two mad-brained young men, decreed to die on the infamous gibbet for fighting a duel! Pardon me, too, that I, a woman of no pretensions to birth and rank, know not how to address a sovereign! Perhaps it is unseemly before the King

to wail and weep, but your Prime Minister is a monster! why does he hate the gallants of France? Ah, he may have seen this old lord's son, for as much as he was a courtier, but my Didier is none of that—ah! he would have loved him had he seen him! But to slay two men at their still tender age, for crossing swords, and scarce scratching one another! Think of their mothers—of their fathers, if they could know! at their being cut off so untimely!

"Heaven will not allow this enormity! and the King will countersign the higher decree of heaven! Oh, that we women could speak as men do, without trembling of the lip, without moistening of the eye, with something better than sob and tear as we bend the knee under your dread Grace's imperious glance!"

"Artful jade!" muttered Bellegarde; for Louis could not face the appealing eyes; it is true that he had long since quailed under the glances of his Spanish wife. "Faith, she will speak more to the purpose than Nangis!"

"Granted that they did wrong!" continued Marion, judging that her hearer's silence, since he had peremptorily checked the marquis, boded rather good than ill; "it will make your kindness in overlooking it, the grander! Such is their youth—such their quickness to draw and cross steel, that they could not have known what grave offence they did! Who has not seen such striplings jostle, exchange high words and whip out their blades upon a trifle! they gash one another; they are carried into the apothecary's—both are sound in a week, and they are better friends than before!"

"But in these hands—God bless them! is the power to save two young heads which may be

a stone at, so to say. Jester Langely, by means of his master-key, had stolen in, but was muffled up in a window curtain; Bellegarde was a painted statue; the irate ruler's eyes fell on Nangis, who, in despair at all failing, had clapped his hand with a war-like gesture upon his sword-hilt.

"How now!" vociferated the King, "are we besieged? are you a peer of the realm—the Lord High Constable re-instated? that you carry a deadly weapon in our presence? Who committed this oversight to the regulations? Because we are in our brother's castle, is that a reason for license ordering things as he does when at home?"

"My poor old friend," thought the duke; "his pride has undone all that beauty gained!"

Luckily, Nangis said nothing and let his hand fall respectfully.

But it was not so easy to appease the enraged monarch, who sought any pretext to resist the beauty's plea—acquiescence in which, he imagined, would be set down to an instantaneous infatuation—so oddly constituted was Louis the Chaste!

"Enough! again, enough!" his voice strongly speaking as ire overcame the chronic cough. "Get you home on your manor to enjoy your peculiar rights! But leave us to deal out justice on our ground, where we are the Justice!"

He spoke with majesty, but Nangis did not quail because of him; it was Marion's eyes he was afraid to meet; shivering as in a cold wind, he turned very red but instantly blanched alarmingly, saying in a tone which was touching though haughty still:

"Sire, in your father's name, bear in mind their youth, and how much they have already

suffered for their deed! Remark the old soldier's pride, broken at your feet! Mercy!"

The King made so choleric a gesture in refusal that the marquis sprang up as though impaled. But again remembering his errand, he said in a slow and well-contained tone:

"I was the brother-in-arms of your father, the Father of all of us in the realm. I rode beside the coach when that monster drove his knife home in his heart. God 'a' mercy!" Stopping, his convulsed countenance was hid in his wrinkled hands, and while the King shuddered, the Duke of Bellegarde closed his fists as if, too, in his eyes, the regicide was re-enacted.

"As was my duty, I stood on guard over my dead liege in the night. Sire, I have seen my own father, alas! and my brothers, six, go down in the dust, in the shock of clashing factions! I have moreover lost the wife who loved me. Thus, the old man whom you behold is like the culprit bound to the wheel, whose limbs are broken by the executioner during a whole day. One by one, the Lord hath broken my limbs as with an iron bar, and, lo! the end of the torture-time is coming!"

He laid his tremulous hand on his heart as though the monarch's repeated refusals had struck it fatally. He made a low bow, and as though addressing the Crown and not its temporary wearer, he added mournfully but with perfect sincerity:

"God save your dread Grace!"

Slowly he went forth and with stateliness, smoothing his features so that the most acute courtier in the outer chamber could not discern the outcome of his mission.

"A bad day!" said the wise ones, scenting

mischief, for misfortune has its aroma like all deadly things, even if they could not draw an augury, "a bad day for seeking favor. Beginning with signing death-warrants, and with this shower damping the prospects of hunting, 'ware to rouse the sullen hound!"

In Nangis' rear, these prudently withdrew.

In this interval, Marion, seeing her champion depart, forgetting her, hastened to forgive him, judging what his grief must be. She rose to make her own retreat good, but her powers failed her. She thought of Didier in his dungeon, although perhaps more than ever averse to receiving the unobtainable pardon, and she sank like a dying one, in a recess, where the curtains draped her almost from view.

Louis dashed away a tear furtively as he watched the disconsolate marquis go out. He turned to his Master of Ceremonies and said:

"A monarch must rein himself tightly not to show weakness. That old warrior smote me to the heart, believe me! A figure from Monstrelet! believe me shaken, but—no pardons will be granted this day!"

He stared into vacancy as though enrapt by a lovely vision, and after a silence, while a faint smile flitted over the blistered lips, he continued, in the unusual confidence inspiring him this morning:

"I have committed a sin to-day!"

"Bless us!" thought Bellegarde. "Marion has made him break the Commandment! Had she persisted, she would have plucked the golden fruit which the dotard failed to grasp!"

King Louis rose and drew the duke into a nook, with his mania for precaution.

"You must take heed, my lord, since you spoke such audacious matters to me just now.

It may do you an injury on the Cardinal's part, after I shall repeat our conversation to him this evening. I am sorry for you!"

"Is this his mode of punishing me for winking at his brother's faulty schemes?" suspiciously muttered the uneasy confidant. "Pshaw! he is too much an Italian to warn me if he intended to sting! he may repeat my words, but he will not give a name to the utterer!"

He looked warily at the King, but the latter was yawning, and saying to himself: "What a bad night I had! and what a restless one I am doomed to!"

He beckoned to Langely to approach, and said to the Master of the Household:

"Send all away! I wish to be alone the rest of the day!"

Although Langely had seen Marion fall within the recess, he had said nothing, and the King was unaware that she had not gone out with Lord Nangis. But Bellegarde noticed her black gown jarring with the curtains' gold and purple, and went to her, stooping and whispering:

"What are you doing here, still, clinging to that pilaster like a statue? You must not linger, after the King's order to be left alone! for the fool does not count! My mateless dove, you must go and mourn elsewhere!"

"I am waiting for my death-stroke!" returned the woman, in a voice the more pitiful as it was without animation.

Bellegarde would have insisted, but Langely touched his arm and said in a tone which the peer had never heard from him before:

"Let her be, duke!"

The noble frowned, but Langely was a gentleman born, and he appeared in his senses.

"Stay!" continued the jester to the woman, in as lordly an accent.

The courtier looked to see what the King would do on perceiving this discussion, but the master had returned to his easy chair in which he had settled down so as to be almost lost to sight; from time to time, he heaved a sigh or coughed.

"I salve my conscience of it!" said the official; "to my mind, she had best haste to my Lord Cardinal!"

Taking his arm with familiarity, Langely pushed him to the door, and by tapping with his lean forefinger on his forehead, high and bald, intimated that he had trust in his wit.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE JESTER'S RUSE.

Moved by curiosity not unmixed with hope, the idol of Didier, rising but still veiling herself by the tapestry, fastened her eyes on the intervener at this junction of two scenes: one of grief and despair—the other she did not dare to forecast.

Out of the luxurious cushions came the King's whining voice, calling for his jester.

The summoned one strode to him and looked down on the collapsed figure, frothing at the mouth from a lozenge for which he had abandoned Dr. Letellier's elixir.

"Hither, boy!" said he in a lachrymose voice. "My heart is sick with the bitterness overflowing it! These walls seem to exude, with their damp, some of that evil spirit with which Gaston impregnates wheresoever he abides, even as the toad swelters its cavity with venom. I would have liked tears to flow, upon that old man's sorrow, but they would not come, any more than smiles upon my arid mouth. E'en at your gibes, and they are fine ones, smiles come not."

Langely made a prolonged bow, saying:

"Oho! somewhiles, I make Louis, hight the Saturnine, unwrinkle, is it so?"

"You are never daunted by my majesty! Send into my soul a sparkle of your gaiety!"

The fool seemed to be torturing his brain for a witticism, but to his hearer's astonishment,

when he spoke, it was in a lugubrious key, and his words were:

"Is not life a bitter thing?"

"Alack!" sighed the King, in sympathy, and pleased after all that his merry-maker had not indulged in mirth counter to his dejection.

"And man is but an ephemeral breath!"

"Nothing more!"

"I prithee, tell me, is not man a doubly unfortunate creature when a monarch, to boot?"

"It is, certainly, a double burden!"

"Rather than vainly busy oneself with this empty life, it were better to lie in the tomb where the stillness is unbroken?"

"I have often said the same!" said the young misanthrope, with a martyr-like air.

"There is no happiness, therefore, but to the unborn and the dead! Man alive is condemned to misery?"

In her ambush, Marion feared that she had made a mistake. If she closed her eyes, she could imagine that she was hearing the ruler with his confessor, not buffoon. She began to be alarmed, for the consequences might be serious of overhearing the King in his rare moments of unbosoming himself. As with Queen Elizabeth, the next step to enjoying the royal expansion of soul was upon the scaffold!

"How you please me, talking in this strain, to-day," observed the rueful monarch, with a misanthrope's relish on seeing a funeral pass when he expected a wedding procession.

"Tell me, gossip," went on Langely, sitting on one arm of the chair, and swinging his long foot as if to point his periods, "think you there is any getting out of the grave, once one is cold-cased within it?"

"We are to learn that hereafter," rejoined

the royal philosopher, becoming more and more gruesome. "I would I were there!"

"Phew!" said Langely, "how you gallop! You are downright unhappy! any fool can see that! Look at your looks! eye these hollow eyes of thine! ink would leave a whitish mark on your suit of sables! and your thin face—a model for a war-hatchet, in case you forge novel weapons again!"

"I shall do so no more! How invent—how work when all is so dreary? Be off, Langely, and seek a new master, for your labor is entirely lost on me! There must be a more lively livelihood than to wear my colors, craped as they are, and jest without fruit! a pretty craft, to be the King's Fool! Your bells jangle out of tune; you are merely a puppet, cast down and taken up as the humor goeth! your laugh has grown so stale that it resembles a grin! What are you doing down there, on the floor? your playing is over! Why do you exist?"

"Pooh! I live out of curiosity—to view wise men committing greater follies than dreamt under my cap-and-bells! Come to this point," spoke Langely with professional boldness, addressing crowned heads more candidly than the late Dame Rose's "Well of Truth;" "why do you care to live? Marry! I am compassionate towards you, with all my heart! I would sooner be a puppet than such a ruler! I grant myself to be a doll of which you hold the string, but your royal robe conceals—imperfectly—a finer string, held by a mightier hand! For my part, I prefer being a puppet in a king's hand to one in a priest's!"

Tacitly acknowledging the scorn in the allusion, although common to him and his nobles, the hearer let a pause pass before he

spoke. Langely had prolonged a laugh at his own pleasantry, since his auditor had not helped him therewith.

"You are mocking, but you speak truly! he is an infernal character! Does not the tale run that Satan came on earth and reigned somewhere as a king?"

The melancholy Louis revelled in stories of *diablerie*.

"Almost a king, Majesty! he reigned in Mantua as the duke paramount, which is gravely set forth in the archives of that duchy, saith Father Carré, who lives as much in Italy as France."

"Carré, the Cardinal's confessor?"

"And mine," replied Langely, without a smile. "Such is fame! Verily, he is prouder to be cited at court as *my* confessor, than the Cardinal's."

Louis did not hear; he was considering, and said:

"If Satan could be a duke, why not a premier?"

"A cardinal!" and Langely shook his head at a surmise beyond his folly.

"All the same, I would rather be your Minister's fool than his confessor."

"May he not be the demon possessing me?" queried the other, not only crossing himself but making the sign against the Evil Eye, hereditary in the Medici family.

"Mine own idea! on second thoughts!" cried the jester.

"But, peace! it must be a sin to talk so lightly of our Arch-Enemy!"

"On the contrary, we must jeer at him and show that we do not hold him in fear."

Distant thunder rumbled under the earth

and a gust of wind sent a puff in at some chinks so that the tapestry waved and its life-sized figures appeared imbued with life.

"Very true was that astrologer, La Rivière, who prophesied that the Thirteenth Louis would have miseries beaded upon him as pearls upon a lady's berth! A man—a youth of but thirty-five—and all fails me, as though I had the untenacious, palsied hand of the aged! Spain presented me with trained cormorants, from Cathay—"

"Cormorants?" queried the jester. "Methought, by their prodigious swallow, they were mere courtiers."

"They are highly esteemed there," continued Louis; "I brought them here to see them catch fish—and the gorged carp will not rise near the surface! The chase? That demon Gaston, my kill-joy, my spoil-sport! invited a band of madcaps from town who have so beaten the Forest bushes that—behold! not a heron stands in a quiet pool—not a bittern booms on the sedge! Hunting, where the rain converts the plain into a sea! Fishing, where the waters run bank-high, and turbid to excess! By the bones of St. Gris—oh, saint, you have clothed all the landscape with *grey* indeed!"

"With *grease* rather!" corrected Langel, at the window; "see, the guards are changing, though up to the fetlock in mud!"

"Truly, my horoscope was undeniable! I am doomed to unhappiness!"

"Aye, our life-web is a black cloth, sparsely sprinkled with spangles!" added the jester.

"Is there to be no alleviation—no consolation?" stammering and faltering for a word, as occurred to Louis in his dark moods.

"I d-d-doubt it!" replied the other, not fear-

ing to mock him. "One by one go the consolers! With Baradas went the finest hunting-horn player of the day! With Chalais, Master of your Wardrobe—by my fay! he was its master, for he wore more of the habits than yourself! with him, disappeared the finest hand at setting a plume or matching colors! And what a marvel in training dogs was poor Haran!"

Louis sighed at each name, favorites, whom he had allowed to be sacrificed, after the manner of Charles I., surrendering his Straffords.

"And now," said the congenial Jeremiah, with emphasis showing that he had arrived at his point, "we are going to lose the last experts in the noble art of hawking!"

"Eh?" cried the King, rising in his chair, with his eye suddenly sparkling.

"I know that you rate it a virtue that a fellow should track ground birds, but, St. Hubert hear me! what is all your butchery of quail and partridge to following the heron, on a swift and sure-footed steed, over the plain, with your gaze on clear sky where the Long-legs streaks it, like the swan's wake in the pool! Huzza for hawking, say I!"

Hurling etiquette to the winds, Langely gave out, full-lunged, the falconer's exultant shout on seeing his hawk sight the prey and direct himself towards it.

Louis echoed the cry, resting his arms on the chair-arms. Color flew to his sallow cheeks, and his lips seemed to plump out with a rare smile.

"Right, boy, a falconer is a demi-god!" said he, quivering with rapture.

"By my halidom, this twain will be made wholly immortals in a short stretch!" said the jester with a doleful mien.

"What twain?"

"The falconers!"

"Two falconers to lose their life?" continued the interested King.

"Two most famous!"

"For mercy's sake, of what are you prating?"

"Why, those two springalds for whom the old noble and the passably-good-looking sister pleaded—uselessly!"

"Say, beautiful! but that was Saverny?"

"One is Saverny, your page who evaded his duties when he found you did not value falconry—"

"I! who dote on it! And this other, Didier of Blois?"

"*Arcades ambo*—falconers both!"

"Falconers?"

"I say it! Saverny learnt the art of glorious Trousegainé."

"*Alias*, le Falconet?"

"Precisely, than whom never breathed a better adept at flying the long-distance hawk!"

"I hear you, and agree!" said the King, listening spellbound.

"As for the devotee of the gentle art from Blois, his instructor was the renowned Matthew, of Novicastrum—"

"Eh?"

"A town of England, where falconers have been reared from time out of mind—who drive amateurs out of *their* mind!" went on Langely, more and more impressively. "I have read that King Henry the Eighth of that realm, before he waxed portentous in girth, would have no other birds in his collection save from Novicastrum, and that his daughter Elizabeth, though not warmly addicted to the sport, so beloved their successor that she would chase

the herons in Romney Marshes, and created her chief-falconer governor of Tilbury Fort!"

"Our King, of her times, lost a treasure in not marrying her when he proposed!" exclaimed Louis, but relapsing, he wailed: "What a calamity! my kingdom to lose two such flyers of the gallant bird, and the art with them! Out on that vexatious duel! When I shall have crossed the Styx, I may meet them hunting the Stygian birds! Meanwhile, all will go before me, arts and delights! What did the hotheads fight a duel about?"

Langely glanced over towards the peeping Marion, who made him a sign of caution. But his reassuring nod bespoke he had his reply ready.

"Oh, one sustained that the Peruvian Alet is finer for chasing the ganet than the gavi-lan!"

"He was wrong," gravely pronounced the sovereign, "but it was in no case a hanging matter!"

Marion faintly smiled and Langely repeated the encouraging nod.

"But," proceeded the King, after a pause, "my right to pardon was relinquished in these cases. The Cardinal says I am always too lenient!"

Langely smiled to himself, as Tacitus might on hearing Nero boast of humanity.

"It is my Lord Cardinal who determines that duellists shall die."

"Sire, what say *you*?" demanded the fool point-blank, raising his voice to cover a sigh within the window bay.

"Duellists must die!" returned the King, after some reflection, in which regret struggled slightly with terror of the Prime Minister.

"That being so," summed up Langely, "good-bye to hawking!"

As if his suit were over, he wandered to the window farthest from that where the weeping woman was ensconced, and looking out, suddenly interjected:

"Gossip, what is this?"

"Has it stopped raining?" counter-queried the other, rousing from a return to reverie.

"No, but I beg you to come and look at this sight."

"What, what! have they caught that poacher whom I saw stealing along beneath the beeches?" Louis paced with dragging foot to the caller. "Still pouring, on my royal word!" grumbled he. "For constancy of rule, Aquarius outrates Jupiter. What is it? I do not like the l-l-lightning!"

"They are relieving the footguards now," said the jester, pointing out of the cloudy glass which diverted the King's wandering, frightened glance from Marion perdu.

"Well, is that all you dragged me hither for?" snarled the King, blinking as another flash striped the heavens.

Langely coolly wiped the steam off the pane with the costly curtains.

"Who is that tall rogue with gold galloon stripes on his sleeves?" asked he.

"His name is the best of him—he is a Mont-hardi—but he is no more than the guards corporal."

"Monthardi is taking a man off the board and putting another in his stead. What is he whispering to the new pawn?"

"The password: 'Melrose,' with 'Merops' as countersign—I invented them! This is an old story. Buffoon, why do you pester us with such

worn-out stuff? What are you shooting at?"

"Just to this," solemnly responded the fool, in that deep tone often making churchmen say that an excellent sermoniser was lost under his cap. "Over this earth, kings are posted as sentinels. Instead of a pike, they are weaponed with a sceptre. When they have walked up and down so many times on their weary round, the Corporal of the Guard of Monarchs, Death, to wit, he puts another sceptre-bearer in the place of each, and to the new-comer he whispers the word:—"

"It is—"

"Clemency!" returned the jester, still more solemnly.

"Your account is correct, saving the word, which is wrong: it is 'Justice,' my poor duldard! That makes it hard on those two poor falconers; for they must die, though—ah, me! it is a grievous loss!"

"They must die, certes! like your Majesty and I myself! Mighty or mean, Death calls away all with equal strictness, and consigns them to the black-hole. But however packed away, the dead rest at their ease. But in this life, how the Cardinal-duke chafes you and weighs upon you! Stay a moment, my lord! One of these days, in the month of the year fore-written, we shall all be sleeping, I, the fool, you, the King, he, the master! Proud though one may be, great as man may swell himself upon the stupidity, cowardice, and slavishness of others, none occupies more than six feet in the grave. Does not Richelieu seem already to be in the hearse, in that grim litter in which he is carried about, shoulder high, by a dozen men, all the same as a bier is borne on its barrow?"

The silent listener shuddered at this dismal dialogue, the son of merry Henry the Fourth deriving sombre satisfaction from dilating on death and its trappings; his tone was light with warped relief as he made answer, stroking his broad lace collar as though decorating himself for lying in state:

"Yea, life is darksome, and the grave breatheth an air serene. I should not long linger before its portals if I had not thee to enliven me a little!"

"Do not let me detain your Majesty!" quickly observed Langely, with burlesque politeness. "I looked in merely to bid you farewell!"

"What farewelling are you talking about?" cried the King, vexed and puzzled.

"Only that I am going to leave you for a long while, I trust."

"Leave me! for a long time?" reiterated Louis, with an acute pang like a seaman's, when a wave sweeps his last companion in wreck off the spar. "What folly!" he grasped his only friend by the sleeve. "Nothing but death unlooses the servant of a king!"

"You have buried the arrow-head in the bull's-eye, gossip! I am about to die."

A peal of thunder shook the great elms and their dripping leaves cast off in a mass their load of wet. Out of a hundred fantastic mouths of the gutters the deluge poured with a monstrous reverberation. Louis turned more pale and shivered to the core, drawing Langely to him as one sheep huddles up to another in the fold.

"Are you a crack-brain, in earnest?" whined he. "Speak out, without a wretched quip!"

"I am condemned to death by the King of France and Navarre."

"If you rail at my death-decrees, fool, nothing can be sacred to you!"

"Sire, I lent my hand to that duel between those two gent—that is gentlemen-falconers. At least, I lent my sword, which fought in the grip of one of them and wounded the other! Here it is! I surrender it to your Grace," and Langely presented the blade by the point, as if he expected to be knighted or beheaded, the action suiting either result.

The King took the weapon with curiosity.

"So now, you have been wearing a real sword in our presence, the attendants letting it pass as one of lath! I' faith!" he made a few passes over the kneeling jester's head, "it is a good one. How doth my merry-man come to carry such a weapon?"

"Sire, being a gentleman, I aided those two of my sort to settle their difference. Do not make any difference in my doom. I was of the party and must pay my scot."

"You lent your sword? Verily you have bound yourself to the penalty, as the *vervel* (hawk's label) is tied to the bird. My poor Truepenny, before the rope is put round your neck, let me clasp it with my arm once more!"

While he affectionately embraced Langely, the latter muttered against his taking the subterfuge so literally, and made a grimace over the royal shoulder so grotesquely that at another time Marion must have laughed. But she was too depressed by the apparent failure of this new friend's scheme.

"A true monarch never is opposed to justice," reasoned Louis, releasing the companion of his privacy and laying the sword on a cushion, and musing. "But it is very harsh that the Cardinal's wholesale edict should impose death

on two falconers and my own Mirth-dies-a-laughing!" He walked up and down the large room, agitated deeply, for he ran his flaccid hand over his wrinkling forehead.

"For merely a duel," resumed he, turning an anxious eye upon his confidant. "But, come, come, console yourself, jolly soul! Life is a sarcasm at which the grave's open mouth grins; and man is but a breath!"

"Deuce take his moralising," grumbled Langely, watching the King stalk up and down in agitation belying that his conclusion was definite.

"How dumfounded you are!" cried the latter testily, wheeling round; "you can be in no doubt that you will be hanged!"

The victim of his own plot was frozen with the icy perspiration on his brow, for his feint was answered by a severe lunge.

"It looks so, unless you speak the barring word," stammered he.

"You gone, who will make me laugh?" He laughed indeed at remembrance of some prank of his sworn humorist, but the notes grated on the latter's ear. "But hark ye! jocund one! if sobeit one is allowed to return from the grave, come you to me, and tell us what you experienced. This will be a chance for you to oblige me, and haply the world—aye—agape for this secret of secrets!"

"The idea of bearing such a unique message is simply delightful!" sneered Langely, shaking his head.

"But your loss will be such a triumph for Cardinal Armand!" pursued the sovereign, still perambulating, with side-glancing at his tormented prey. "Red Stocking will have walked over the Blue-striped one!"

He alluded to the hose the jester wore in formal livery of his office. The other allusion was to Richelieu, whose limbs, clothed in cardinal red, it was said, capered in the ballets at court, or even once performed a saraband before Queen Anna, as lively as Louis', before the one had shortness of breath and the other the gout.

Langely's countenance had settled down in so reproachful a cast that the observer was touched in his pride. Color came to his sunk cheeks, and he cried with an imperious air, while a wild and fitful light danced in his hollow eyes:

"How now! do you doubt, that I may not—an' I would! be the master!"

"Rabelais would have replied: 'Perhaps!' and Montaigne: 'What should I know about that?'" answered Langely.

Still piqued, seized by some freakish spirit of generosity, the King sat down at the table where, that same morning, he had appended his signature to the formal writ of execution against Marquis Nazaire de Saverny and the Sire Didier, to the gratification of Judge Lafemas. With rare determination, he took up a quill, and trying it on his gnawed nail, said peremptorily:

"Fool, hand me a sheet of parchment!"

Langely dropped his anxiety and apathy; he sprang to the table end, drew a clean skin for writing from a drawer, and placed it flat on the board before his master, whose hand rested on it, tremulous with a novel emotion.

"Am I going to be ill?" said he, gasping.

"No, you are going to do good!" retorted the jester, his face a mask of the Comic Muse.

The King scribbled a few lines and added a tall and sprawling "LOUIS," all in capitals.

The fool had the wax ready at the lighted taper, and dropped a blob on the vellum. The writer pressed on it the stamp dangling at his belt, and the pardon for the two duellists, and their aiders and abettors, was there, good as ever the royal mandate was.

"I pardon the trio!" said Louis, leaning back as to admire himself.

But instantly he curled up out of his grand attitude: a dazzling flash of electricity illuminated the innumerable tree-tops, and was followed by a crash of a struck tree and the thunder. Langely was not a jot staggered: he ran across the room, and plucking Marion out of her ambush, he said to her:

"Lady fair, hasten! go down on your knees to his tender Majesty, and thank him for having forgiven us three!"

Marion, from whom the King flinched more than he had from the lightning—and seeming to be as much dazzled—dropped, kneeling, before the royal chair, muttering thanks, no doubt, but her tongue was not freely unlocked, as doubts still lingered, though she had closely watched this singular game.

"The Fool swept the board," remarked Langely, chuckling, "where the Knight failed to check the King!"

"Whose hands am I to kiss for the boon?" demanded she, a little roguishly; "yours or my gracious lord's?"

Louis regarded the new-comer with less astonishment and more apprehension now. He regretted his act, fearing that he had fallen into a trap.

Langely meant to be on the safe side, seeing

his frown. The donor might demand the pardon back; so he handed it to the woman, who kissed it, to solve the dilemma stated by her, and thrust it within her stomacher.

Angry at having been a jester's dupe, all in the presence of a young woman, Louis recovered some coolness or at least his ill-nature. He thrust out his hand and said in a vexed tone:

"Hold, madam, one instant! I require that paper—"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Marion, in dismay; but immediately, with a return of her gay spirits as she felt the valuable document on her heart, she said with archness:

"The King must be obeyed, but never will hand of mine undo a good action of his Majesty! none but your royal hand shall touch it! Come, take it, but with it, take my life! it is dearer than life itself!"

The King, who had risen as she had done, recoiled, embarrassed.

Langely clapped his hands together, without making a sound, and whispered:

"Hold your prize! Do not be alarmed! Louis the Chaste will not attack that fort!"

"G-g-give!" stammered the monarch, lowering his eyes, which happened to be caught by Marion's.

"T-t-take it!" cried Marion, mocking, feeling impelled to out-brave everything at this moment.

Louis rubbed his eyes as one seeing a supernatural vision; then he uttered an execration against the lightning, as if that blinded him; knitting his brows, he wondered what siren was conspiring with Langely to set free the

duellists and also, he reflected, to embroil him with his Minister?

He had seen pictures of the famous beauty of his reign, but all was hazy; he was sure that she had never been presented at court, and this added to his perplexity.

"It was months," whispered Langely, in the meantime, "before he ventured to kiss the Queen!"

Without raising his eyes again upon his visitress, Louis made a wave of the hand, imperious but not unkind, and bade her "Be-gone!"

The Mistress of Deportment to royal princesses could not have outdone her elaborate courtesies; Mondori would say it was worthy of Ximena; and she replied with noble and dulcet accent:

"The King has right royally done his part; let me properly do mine! I haste to liberate the prisoners!" At the door, she tottered and turned pale. "If M. Laffemas—but no! heaven will not play toss with our suffering hearts! Saints and Graces! wing me to outstrip that hellhound!"

She flew out as though the parchment buoyed her; so different from her manner of entrance, that the guards smiled and sympathetically wished her "Goodspeed!"

"Who is she?" marvelled the King, closing his eyes as though to retain the vision.

"A sister of one of those falconers," Langely replied. "Not Saverny but t' other's! ah, he is, after her likeness, a handsome blade, who would make you a splendid page! and a falconer, too!"

The fool did nothing by halves; after secur-

ing Didier's life, he was trying to secure his future.

"He must be handsome—his sister is lovely!" muttered Louis. "She is one accustomed to have her way! Strange! she almost made me cower! I could no more gaze on her, steadily, you know, than on the ethereal fire!"

Largely smiled, waiting, not at ease over the final result of his deception.

"Buffoon, you have tricked me!"

"I am paid to do that!"

"You stand in sore need of a special pardon!"

"Grant it, sire!" said the jester kneeling. "Every pardon is so much weight that a king relieves himself of by giving it!"

"You speak truly, boy," said Louis solemnly. "You know that it grieves me to see the Mont-faucon execution-place. For old Nangis truthfully spoke: by peopling the cemetery where the executed repose, with their severed heads between their knees, I make my palace a desert!"

Again he betrayed the fever of his mind by walking the floor as in insomnia.

"My Minister committed treason in wresting from us our right to pardon and making us publicly relinquish it. Harry the Fourth's son ought to be merciful, for God was merciful to him and many times in stress saved his dear life. My people wail to see me shut up—entombed by this man, who rolls me up in his rosy robe as in swaddling-clothes or a winding-sheet! I am no better than a king dethroned, cast down, disarmed! No, no!" he cried with vigor, "I could not suffer those two gallants to meet an ignominious death! Life is too lovely for them, and visibly a gift of heaven to be rashly dashed out of its casket! God can open

the grave, for He knoweth what this life is— but no king can! They shall live and their families will bless me for having restored them. I yearn for the blessing of that old hero and that beautiful young woman!”

“Do not forget mine, gossip!”

“At all events, what is written, is written! especially when by the King’s hand. You smirk, deceiver!” said he, turning sharply upon the jester keeping pace with him, like a dog, a step in the rear, “you know as I do that the Cardinal-duke will be furious!”

“Ferocious! his wrath may kill him!”

“But I shall have given you pleasure for once, who so many times has exhilarated this aching, melancholy heart!”

“The sky is clearing,” broke in Langel, to hide his emotion at the King showing gratitude. “In half an hour, we may go and fish.”

“Fish, after a rain like that? the swirling waters will render fishing-gear useless.”

“Well, I am already hand-in-glove with old Nezenlair, the poacher whom you saw sneaking through the woods. He possesses an infallible bait for the carp, which would lure the Fiend himself from his hottest fire on a February night! Come out, for I promise your Majesty a carp *à la—à la—*Watering-mouth, of my own concoction, which would appease Garagantua!”

The weather brightened up as if sympathetic with him. Louis bade Langel call for his valet to dress him for the outing.

“Good!” soliloquised Langel, as he donned high boots to wade in the mud. “I mean to keep the King out of his Eminence’s way until a revocation of the pardon is impossible. History will cite one instance when our Louis,

Thirteenth of that name, behaved royally—though by mistake!”

As he returned through the ante-room there was an uproar. The courtiers had abandoned it, but a small group filled a corner, servants and petty nobles wearing a serious air.

In the midst were two ecclesiastical dignitaries, one of whom the jester immediately recognised.

“The Cardinal in Grey, and the Bishop of Autun,” he cried out.

“Say, the Bishop in grey,” corrected Joseph, owning at least to this degree, “and the Cardinal! I humbly come to present my father of Autun, hastening to thank his Majesty on his reception of the Red Hat.”

While the courtiers hurried to salute his Grace of Autun, Langely unceremoniously detached the introducer from his protégé, and drew him into a recess, saying in a low voice:

“Marion Delorme was here but now! she procured the pardon of Marquis Saverny and his fellow-offender—”

“Of Didier?” exclaimed Joseph, showing in which of the two he was the more interested.

“She hopes to outspeed that rogue Laffemas!”

“Too late! the latter is off post-haste to remove the culprits to Rueil.”

At the horrifying word, Langely let his hands drop in despair.

“All is lost, then,” groaned he. “What Villany always thrusts his baleful spoon into peaceful porridge!”

“Patience! it shall be withdrawn!” said Joseph who had recovered his calmness.

But the assurance did not remove the jester’s expression of hopelessness.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MYSTERIES OF RUEIL.

Langely yielded to the popular belief that Rueil, spite of having been decorated and embellished into splendor, was the Cardinal's favorite residence for satiating an extremely vindictive nature, which age and ails exacerbated. Far from its vicinity, tattlers detailed how superb tapestries muffled perfidious sliding panels, soft carpets covered traps of ingenious construction and supernatural facility, and the solid walls were pierced with Judas traps and Dionysius' ears for the use of spies.

Everybody knew how the private executions took place.

The Eminent host would have a silent companion at his table, together with the fated guest. This dumb feaster was the executioner. After the repast, sumptuous and provided with exquisite wines, spite of prelatical vows, the host would point out an inner room as where the important confabulation should be held. He would pass out through a door; the victim would follow at his gown's hem, with the headsmen bringing up the rear. At a certain point, the last would press his foot on a spring and a trap would gape at the feet—under the feet, in fact, of the dupe, who would be precipitated into an abyss, where horrors, outdoing those in the embrace of the Virgin of Nuremberg, clustered upon him till he perished.

Absurd as these tales were, we see that even

a royal jester did not mock at them when told of the modern Bluebeard and his castle.

To this den of terrors Laffemas had spared no expense—out of the State purse—to remove his prisoners straightway from Nangis.

Having sent them into secure lodgings, he ordered workmen to open a breach in the walls. He did not state the reason but the chief domestics guessed.

“That gap,” said they, their pride in ability to solve one enigma outdoing their discretion, “it is for the entrance, without his alighting, of my Lord Cardinal, for he comes in a litter since his gout cripples him—he will be carried straight into the court-yard where the scaffold will be erected.”

Others, who had been to Paris, described the construction: a huge catafalque-looking barrow, carried by a score or two of men; draped with red curtains, it suggested, said a facetious butler: “Leviathan wading in the Red Sea.”

With a view of frustrating attempts on his patron's life, the Lieutenant of Internal Police perambulated the town, cloaked and covered with a broad-brimmed Spanish hat.

It was filling with curious idlers, expecting to see the Cardinal enter, even though they might not witness the double execution, within the château walls.

He caught scraps of conversation at inn doors, but even this chatter was guarded as though the proximity of the dread abode inspired caution.

“These lords commit queer crimes,” said one more loquacious haranguer to his fellows, at the Cross-keys Inn; “they come to blows now and then, and as they are adepts at fencing, marry! they have to cast dice to decide who

shall be scratched! rarely do they kill, but when they do, if the dying is spun out, why, they prove the deed is heinous by slaying the pair of them officially!"

The audience acquiesced but could not explain the matter.

In the lower resorts, wine-shops, where gentry's servants and rustics gathered, Laffemas heard uglier mutterings, undying echoes of the Jacquerie, and forebodings of the chaos to follow the removal of Richelieu's iron hand from the controlling rod.

"Suppose, mates," said one of the workmen Laffemas had seen tunnelling the wall, "suppose, some fine day, we should fell a tradesman with a bludgeon, or do a finer deed—"

"Opened the Revenue cashbox without the proper key?"

"Or made meat for the wife and young ones of a buck out of the Royal Forest?" proceeded another incipient rebel.

"Whatever we did," resumed the first speaker, "I wager you should want plaguey good eyes, masters all, to see any handsome head-high scaffold built up and hung with black cloth from Ypres, fairer than my master wears for a holiday coat—for the likes of us!"

But this was far from the kind of treasonable utterance for which Laffemas, in his ill-savored career, had arrested hundreds.

Disappointed, like a hunter without cause to fire a shot, he retraced his steps to the castle, where he had the satisfaction of seeing one of his acquaintance alight from a vehicle at the wicket and rap up the warder.

"Marion Delorme!" ejaculated he, with joy, hurrying up. "I am sure that she has arrived with a respite, if not a pardon. Luckily," he

went on, repressing a diabolical chuckle, "I am provided against her captivating the Chaste Susannah who masquerades in breeches as our King!"

Indeed, the gatekeeper, only peering through the little trap in the great gate, answered Marion, who claimed passage on a royal order:

"Entrance is forbid!"

"The King's own hand refused!" faltered the woman, staggered after so lately seeing at Chambord how the royal power was reverently bowed to.

"The King's own head would be squeezed in the gate an' he ventured it," replied the surly Cerberus, proud of serving a greater than the great.

While she was mustering courage to ask to see a captain of the ward, Laffemas approached. Nodding to her familiarly, which made her lower lip curl in scorn, he said in a jeering voice to hide his wish to win and coax:

"The Cardinal's order is paramount here, where he is suzerain lord! I can go in with it," flourishing a folded paper as if to cross hers, after the manner of opposing a sword, "when I like, and it will carry another with it. Will you accompany me?"

The warder, accustomed to obey Laffemas, ruling next under his master, and concluding that he had met an acquaintance from his tone, shut the trap to leave them in privacy, and retook his occupation of cleaning a petronel, altered to shoot leaden bullets instead of stone.

"I bear better than an order to enter here," said Marion, unable to lose her exultation altogether from a subordinate's rebuff. "I bring those two young gentlemen's pardon!"

"But I cover that card, too," returned the

official quite as triumphantly. "I am promised, and I await hourly, the Minister's order revoking all anterior relating to that precious pair, and directing their execution, under mine own eyes—perhaps under my Lord Cardinal's. List! that hammer is knocking the nails in upon their bier! literally, it is fastening up the last festoon of mourning cloth upon their scaffold."

"Oh, is hope altogether fled!" gasped the woman, drawing her hand over her eyes not to let the wretch see the tears again gathering.

"Hope is a transitory light! The King's clemency is a fragile thing, coming God knoweth how slowly and fitting with a swallow's wing!"

"But the King was stirred unto the heart on hearing how they stood in peril and that he might rescue them!"

"Pooh!" sneered the Chief of the Royal Police, "what can the King do athwart the Cardinal-duke's will?"

Marion wrung her hands, crushing that paper which had warmed her on the journey but now cooled like a dead reptile.

"Oh, Didier," she murmured as though her tongue were benumbed, fixing her eyes on the newly-pointed wall, "the last hope is extinguished! I have done my utmost!"

"But, talking of hope," insinuated Laffemas, smiling encouragingly, "the last flicker is not out! Far from that! Understand that I am in power here! within that palace-fort, as without, and remotely around about too! Your warrant is worthless, or soon self-cancelled, but this is one which would enable that man—those men, inside the dismal cells down there, to quit the prison, and the country, and reach

the golden Ind, where a principedom may await a bold adventurer! Meanwhile, accept my hand! we will return to Paris, and the Lieutenant Civil's bride may rest assured that no one will recall with unmeet gibes that she was Marion Delorme!"

"Heavens," said she, still clasping her hands, one of which the tempter strove to clutch but could not disentangle. "Be off, sir!"

"Is this your last word to the offer of *his* life? with safety afar, and a prospect of a petty prince's reign? And you love him?"

"Will you please to be silent!" said she haughtily, like an insulted princess. "Let those ravens overhead croak at scenting bloodshed, but do not join your voice to their cry, as long as you wear mortal shape!"

Laffemas was startled. More lawyer than Lothario, feminine caprice, much more resolution, was a gulf which he could not fathom and its breadth dazed him.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked, keeping himself between her and the gate, in case she purposed another appeal there. "You were wont to be much more human, not to say womanly! By the Sword of Justice! now that your latest conquest is in our net and you might release him, provide him with immunity and riches, to say nothing of winning yourself a respectable position, nay, a lofty one, for I have not yet done climbing! you will not pay the price! A life for a hand! a light return, I estimate! Who would not give his hand with his head at stake? who would not put a ring round his mid-finger instead of a halter round his jugular! And here, it is, not *his* hand—for he will emerge from the kingdom intact—but your hand which delivers him. You have

sheerly to put on this single ring, and he—all his rings, manacles, fetters, drop and dissolve, like snowflakes in the chimney-smoke!"

Without a glance for him, a curl of the thinned lips alone denoting that she heard him more or less dreamily, Marion rivetted her attention on the gates, behind which was all she held endeared.

"Vermin," said she suddenly, without looking at him as he offered to kneel to her, though it was the open street, "I have made a great stride from the place where you saw me. I have risen, my lord—but such as you would not understand these transformations! Even to save a beloved one, the beloved, I would not become infamous again. Indeed, I could not! Do not think the lost lamb strays again, and again, after being carried back, in arms, to the fold? that the fallen angel, permitted to weep in at the gates once more on the realm of the snowy-white, would turn away from that entrance forever, whoever beckoned without? Oh, my darling," continued she, as if her voice low but earnest, could be heard by Didier in his cell, "your breath has re-infused my soul. Of the former Marion, nothing clings to the present Marie, and it is my love for you which has restored the virginal purity!"

"But it is you who cannot have understood," persisted Laffemas, fearing that she had gone mad with grief, "I offer to make you my lady!" He followed her, step for step. "I stand next to the Minister in power, as I do in kindred, you know! I will stifle all calumny, imprison, rack, do away with all villifiers! To begin with, while we release this Didier, we will banish this Saverny so far that never will he scribble doggerel about Parisian revelries to reach a

French eye or ear! Marry me, adored one! You do not love me? pah! Love comes after wedlock as appetite comes upon eating!"

"Monster!" cried Marion, slashing the pardon across his face, heated and reddened, as it was held up to hers, his hat having fallen off in his excitement. "You rise from crime to vice! Let me repent and die holy, since he must also die."

"Methinks," pursued the unintimidated judge, changing his accent, "you have still a favor to sue of me. I am the Cardinal's sole representative here; to me open all these doors! If you would, I can let you within, to see him for the last time! He dies in the morning, or even earlier, this depending on how soon the Cardinal arrives. He is due to witness the double execution."

"The Cardinal," she repeated, remembering vaguely that Langely and the Duke of Bellegarde had suggested her applying to Richelieu.

"He comes this evening!" proceeded Laffemas in his ordinary, passionless voice.

"But he is ill, bedridden with the gout!" protested she, eager to catch this man in a lie.

"True, but he would not lose this distraction! A bath of blood restores health, in some cases—see the medical tractates! so, the sight of bloodshed regales some natures! he will come, borne in his great litter, for which, see, a breach has been cleft in yonder wall! The gates would not admit that roomy conveyance, carrying my lord, sometimes a secretary, his doctor, the deathsman, at a pinch!"

The turn in the situation had plunged poor Marion into profound reverie. It was not the first time, to her knowledge, that a royal de-

cree had been annulled by the Prime Minister's later one. She shuddered, too, at consciousness that all this coincided with the Court's fable and popular impression of the statesman's longing to glut himself with bloodspilling.

Convulsions shook her and the final one lifted her out of her dismay. She drew her hands, pale and thin to what they were when models to Parisian connoisseurs, across her eyes and forehead as if to clear her sight, and fastened it, wild and fierce, on the Lieutenant-Criminal, who recoiled in fright.

"I contrived their escape; his escape from Blois," said she without apparent connection, but her hearer was sharpened by his passion and he comprehended. Out of the question that any but Marion was interested in this unknown!

"You could not repeat the trick here," replied he with quickness. "But the Cardinal's trusted lieutenant can! I would, too, bring about their escape if—"

"Tell me how!" she demanded, resolutely, as if come to a fresh and novel determination.

This looked like accepting him as an accomplice, at least.

"Be it your will," gallantly said he, "and I can have this gap, intended for the host's entry, guarded by soldiers in my privy pay. But be quick, if you mean alliance, for I hear a stir within. It is some evolution of the watch, for the guard is mounted doubly!"

Going over to the gateway, he listened so intently that the observer believed that his ears pricked up, pointedly, like a satyr's.

She wrung her hands again in anguish. A searching gaze appealed to heaven, but the

skies were lurid, and not a single gleam irradiated the smoky expanse.

"Anything to save you, Didier!" she murmured. "Then, to balk this villain of his ransom! I will stoop to perfidy upon this demon of guile, to begin with, before I bow to such an odious sacrifice as he exacts."

"If she cheats me, I forgive her!" muttered he, puzzled.

Then he became gloomy; after having intimated his willingness to betray his master and benefactor, and to foil him, he might well be timorous. He listened to the soldiery performing mysterious marches behind the walls as though they might be coming instinctively to arrest him.

"This place is fashioned to repeat the echoes," said he nervously. "And the town is full of spies. Look! under that dragon-head, spitting the dew from the gutters, is a little door, dissimulated in the flying buttress. It leads to the chapel of St. John the Decolated—"

He emphasized the word, but she listened unmoved.

"The chapel—"

"Where the prisoners will receive the Church's last attentions?" caught up the woman, following out his idea.

"Nothing more exact. But the priest will not come yet. Not till I appoint. Be you there at eleven, and I will admit you."

"You?"

"Can you not trust your future bridegroom?" said Laffemas, making the sign of the cross. "In church, a priest at hand—my deadliest foe were safe-guarded! we are not a cardinal's

nephew for nothing—and still more, you—my dearest friend!”

This sudden assumption of piety backed by the claim to be Richelieu’s relative did not deceive Marion, but she had not a doubt on his desire to fulfill his part of the bargain.

“I come!” said she. Then, with a strange confidence, not to be shown had she not wished to convey her menace, she added:

“To that Spanish dress in which you saw me belonged a dagger. I threw off the dress, but I still hold the steel.”

At this, Laffemas refrained from trying to snatch a kiss, even on her hand, and sighing noisily, let her go her way, watching her like a mariner, on the verge of storm, fixing his gaze on the pilot’s star, as if to retain it longer in sight.

“All goes well,” said he, returning to the castle. “So, I must cross my protector!” He trembled, but a sudden warmth succeeded the chill, and he continued his thought: “For such a prize, Papa Armand’s displeasure is a trifle!”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

OF TWO PRISONERS, ONE WILL WEEP, THE
OTHER SING.

Whisked from Nangis, without clear idea of what would ensue, Didier and the Marquis of Saverny passed the time on the journey in very diverse attitudes. The latter was the admiration of the Red Arquebusiers for his ease, merriness and a petulance alien to the character of a man under the bitterest doom.

After the fashion of wealthy culprits whose last dress should enrich the headsman, he had arrayed himself for the death-march as for a wedding one. When, as the King's page, he tricked himself out to attend his Majesty at a Queen's ball, he never wore finer feathers.

The other, saddened and shamed to the heart by discovery of his idol's true standing, still clung to his funereal black, having dashed off the last trace of theatrical frippery chafing him while under the Mondorian wing.

Saverny laughed, drank, threw dice, and joked along the road, retailed adventures to amuse the soldiers, let the captain win of him over the drumhead, in short, delighted all around him; but Didier remained taciturn and sober.

"They will take him for the ghostly confessor waiting on the wretch to be hanged and the lord as a jester who cheered him at his other elbow!" said the captain.

Thus, the escort were glad to be relieved of one charge at Rueil gates, but sorry to wish a

"Good deliverance!" to the noble, whom they never expected to see alive again, so dread even to martial men was the reputation of Richelieu's country seat.

In the sombre cell selected for them by the malicious Laffemas, who had not forgot his ducking at Nangis, the pair preserved the same behavior.

On the afternoon when the last-named made his proposition to Mdlle. Delorme, the jailer came as usual to lead them into the garden, enclosed by a high wall, to take the air.

Saverny followed gaily, humming a satire, for decidedly his success with his (?) lampoon had turned him towards Pasquinage, and Didier pacing behind, wrapped in his black meditations as in a pall.

The man went the inside rounds of the wall, yet seemed loth to depart, which seeing, Saverny, on the alert with his perennial hopefulness for any diversion, called out:

"My saint be thanked! what delicious air! how balmy is the breeze on the other side of these bricks and spikes!"

"My lord," said the turnkey, turning round as if to seize an opportunity, "your shoe-latchet is loose—you will trip up and—"

"By breaking my neck, cheat the deathsman? Tie it, prithee, good fellow! here is a gold crown, to repay you for this and other petty attentions."

The man pocketed the piece so quickly that it seemed juggled out of sight, and stooped as though for the imaginary task. In this posture, without lifting his head and in a voice too low for Didier to overhear, had he been listening, he said:

"Listen, my lord marquis, to a couple of words, if you please."

"Make it four," returned Saverny, lightly but at once interested.

"Would you like to breathe that balmy air without?" in a still lower voice.

The marquis flushed but he tossed a pebble playfully toward a marten flitting in and out of the *chevaux-de-frise*, and replied as cautiously:

"How the deuce can one walk so easily out of Rueil?"

"That is my business."

"Is it? I should have thought it quite the otherwise: to keep us in! But go on with the tale!"

"I can liberate you."

"The mischief you can! Ha, ha! The Cardinal wants to stop a cavalier from returning to the ballroom of the world, namely, Society, but we may dance in spite of him withal!" He thrilled with hope and his eyes sparkled. "Verily, I shall be glad to change my partner—grim Death! Be the wall-flower, thou! I choose Dame Life!"

Stooping to pat the man on the shoulder, as he rose, his pretended service accomplished, he continued:

"When is it to come off?"

"After dark, this evening!"

Saverny clapped his hands and took a dancing position, waiting for the signal to advance.

"It is no compliment to Rueil, but from the little I have seen of it, I am not sorry to quit it. Tell me, whence this succor?"

"I was bid to say 'Nangis!'"

"My dear old uncle in the saddle again? Ah, the King's rebuff has spurred him. Between

the King and me, his truant page, we have rejuvenated the old gentleman! Is our ever-green grey-beard on the spot?"

"The only gentleman I have seen in the matter is one called by his varlets the Banneret—"

"Oh, Brichanteau, my cousin? good! All will go as if on oiled ways! But this drawing up of Joseph from the pit, includes my fellow-captive, does it not?"

With a flirt of the finger he indicated Didier, who sat on a stone bench in the shade, brooding in perfect unconsciousness of what was going on.

"My lord, as I understand my instructions, I am to save but one! and I fear I can smuggle out but one," returned the jailer, puzzled.

"Not if the reward be doubled?"

"I can manage only one," repeated the man, shaking his head reluctantly.

"Only one," muttered Saverny; "this is un-gentlemanly of my cousin, who saw Didier fight so valiantly. If it were Marion managing this escape, I do her the fairness to suppose that she would have both of us out, or none—though she does not harbor much good will toward me!"

In fact, the man was acting to the letter. The plot was Marion's but she had allowed Brichanteau to negotiate with the warder. She had insisted on Didier being given the choice if but one could be passed out, but the cousin of Saverny, having no affection for the stranger, had reversed the scheme and imposed on the intermediary the proviso which he reiterated to the marquis.

The latter, like one drowning, reviewed his life. Impressed salutarily and profoundly during their journey and in their previous prison-

stay by his companion's excellence, valor, loftiness, constancy, purity of morals and unconcealable fitness for a great future, he resumed, drawing the man under cover of a coping-stone: "Hearken! The one to save is that one!"

"The glum gentleman!" said the turnkey, repeating the nickname under which the escort had presented Didier to the garrison; "you are jesting!"

"I have done jesting. He is your file-leader if we break out."

"What funny ideas you have, my lord! Your uncle, *vice* your cousin, since such is this Banneret of Brichanteau, does this—risking more than I do, which is but my post and my back, while he and they risk estate and head! He does this for his nephew, mark! not a stranger!"

"If that is the settled matter, go, get the two coffins ready!" and Saverny firmly spun round on his heel and went over to Didier, around whose bent neck he affectionately passed his arm.

The jailer hesitated, shook his head, seemed to reflect on another solution to the problem, smiled as if slightly hoping one, and abruptly went out, visibly astonished at such nobility on the frivolous courtier's part.

Saverny laughed at this complimentary wonder, but his laugh for once was grating.

"Arouse thee, brother," said he; "yet I know not why I should arouse thee from a brown study to a black look-out! To be only twenty and, in September, not to see October! It is discomforting!"

Didier stood up. From his doublet he drew the miniature of Marion which Saverny gave him, and contemplated it with intensity and

concentration making him oblivious to the marquis' presence.

The portrait was exquisitely executed, a jewel, without regard to the likeness, which was close. The artist had caught the expression of eternally young beauty in those like Marion amalgamating the blonde and the brunette types, adding the gloss which ultra refinement gives an impressionable woman. The loveliness and incomparable grace appeared above one human being's portion; the forehead might have been copied from a martyr's; out of the open, angelic-frank eyes shone candor, and modesty tempered the lustre. The lips were as a child's, and innocence still lingered, struggling prettily with caprice.

The Court Beauty loved the obscure gentleman; but being the Court Beauty, his triumph was emptiness. The fruit was of the Dead Sea species.

He dropped the portrait as though the case scorched him.

How slow was this doom in coming to break the bonds binding him to her? Often before had he wished that his nurse—mother he was not to recall! had dashed him down and crushed his head on the stones! What evil had his nascent spirit wrought that ever he was born? He would have forgiven his mother if she had stifled him!

Saverny watched his brow corrugating, with bewilderment that men could suffer such deep emotions and survive.

"Look, friend," interrupted he, "see how low the swallows skim! We'll have rain to-night! good to cover an escape!"

Didier did not hear a word.

"How fickle, foolish, inscrutable a thing is

woman!" mused he. "Deep and stormy as old Ocean! Alas! that ever on that expanse I ventured my sail! Marion was the star by which I guided my bark, my only guide, and lo! I have wrecked myself on the sterile shore, where the wrecks abound that followed that same decoy-light! Yes, I am a-thinking, that I was born good at heart! The future shone out so fair and serene that I might accept it as a celestial beacon. Unhappy woman! would that you had not dared to deceive me so thoroughly when I confided my soul utterly to yours!"

"You are dwelling upon 'Marie,'" said Saverny softly. "You try but cannot succeed in anchoring on that quicksand!"

He picked up the portrait, without looking at it, so absorbed was he in admiration of Freedom, peeping a-tiptoe over the rampart, and handed it to his companion.

"But can I fling you among degraded things?" said Didier, his eyes fastening themselves on the miniature, to the exclusion of all else, "although you have deluded me! Demon, how came you by those cerulean wings?"

"I am not partial to guessing riddles," said Saverny, "excepting one, to-wit: how to get astride that wall, with or without cerulean wings! If we had a mattress, somewhat thicker than ours, to lay upon those spikes—"

Didier started as if only now aware he had a bystander; he thrust the miniature, without looking at it, within his breast. He went over to the marquis, who was staring at a part of the wall where the house-leek had a hold.

"Singular prodigy," said he; "you know that miniature you gave me? Well, it is alive!"

"Yes, it is allowed to be a living likeness, ha, ha!"

"I tell you it is alive!" persisted Didier, with something like maniacal irritation at any check; "while you were sleeping, in the dark and silence, it gnawed at my heart!"

"Poor fellow! I have heard of victims having an attack of *Marion-ery* to that degree, but it nips you keenly!"

"From that case emanated the image—it filled the cell, and sought to exclude another and a sweeter one—"

"Another love? zounds, my Cato!"

"My mother, I think," softly said Didier.

"Your mother," echoed Saverny, with no lightness now. "I have heard of such admonitions to foundlings! Listen, friend, you will see your parents before you die! It is certain after heaven so warns."

A rattle of keys at a door disturbed them, as Didier leaned on his friend's arm.

"Malice of Evil!" cried Saverny, "are we never to enjoy any privacy—in a prison, too! What have we now?"

Another jailer than the bribed one appeared at the door in the wall, and without entering the enclosure, said:

"Previous to the Lord Cardinal's visit, gentlemen, a royal commissioner is expected to pay you one."

"Honor upon honor!" sarcastically returned the noble. "What is he commissioned to bring us? Supper, with the latest comestibles from Paris? A turkey stuffed with Vincennes mushrooms, or wine of the Borgias' vintage, fresh from Rome—if Rueil has it not already in its cellars!"

"Please you, merry gentlemen, I forecast that

he will read the sentence at length as the tid-bit!" smilingly rejoined the warder, for all appeared of good cheer to Saverny, whether from native affability, his contagious good humor or bribery.

"A royal commissioner! Are we to be branded, too, with the lily-flower?" cried Saverny, but the door banged and the key grated as it was relocked.

The two relapsed into moodiness, growing in degree alike. Didier's supreme melancholy extracted the other's undue gaiety without his being ameliorated.

"Friend," said Saverny at last, giving way to a feeling not often known to him, but which had begun on finding that his uncle's affection and cousin's attachment were not of the fading kind, "preach to me, since you will not sing love-songs! It will sadden me but it may console!"

Not a word did he say of the boon rejected because it could not be transferred or shared.

"What are you asking me?" inquired Didier, remaining in stupor since his endeared one's name had been pronounced. His spirits were weakened by captivity, and forgetfulness was stealing over him, so that he remembered little and knew less.

"Speak to me of death," continued the marquis, taking him by the arm, and remarking that the word strangely brought color to the pale cheek. "You have studied—what is it, after all?"

"Everything *after all*! Did you sleep well last night?"

"Not up to my usual mark. The fatigue of the journey, the change of bed, not for the better! my couch seemed stuffed with shuttle-

cocks! If I had ever had the time to do anything reprehensible, I should say that my conscience had stepped outside of me and thrashed me with nettles!"

"Well, when you are dead, friend, your bed will be still harder, but, on our faith! you will sleep soundly! That is all!"

"But the Infernal Regions?" went on the moralist's pupil, shuddering like a child urging an elder to tell ghost stories which it shrank from.

"The Inferno! It is nothing beside what some lives pass through here!" answered the other with a terrible smile. "Have ambition and fall in love, and in both courses be baffled! ah!"

"You speak with a confidence that banishes my dread, but I still cannot say that I relish the idea of being hanged. It gives me a stiff neck to think of that!" and the speaker moved his hand up and down his nape furtively as when one suddenly expects a crick to demonstrate itself.

"It is still death, so do not look on it too narrowly!"

"You may take it easily, but be dashed to it! if I do. I am not bragging when I say I fear mere dying very little, but death is just death and I do not like it served up in a chain of hemp sausages!"

The shadow thickened around the young preacher and the young novice.

"Death," proceeded the former, "wears a thousand aspects. The gibbet is one. Without a doubt there is a disagreeable shock when the knot extinguishes our vital spark as the snuffing fingers put out the candle light—a pressure on the gorge, and out goes the flaming soul! Whither? To be lost, or to unite

with another mass of fiery essence? But what does it matter after all? Provided that on the earth was nothing but blackness, what concerns us that we lie beneath a mossy stone which praises our virtues while crushing us, or whether we dangle in an iron cage, high in lonely air, while the ravens tear gobbets of our dwindling flesh? what odds!"

Saverny shuddered, but he tried to say with admiration:

"Youthful as you are, the Cynic of Sinope never thumped his tub to a finer dissertation! As for Socrates, his hemlock draft were a sweet posset to this!"

"Let the body look to itself," went on the other, warming with his theme and at having as an auditor the representative of the class most opposed to him in fate and tastes, "whether the vulture's beak rips off my outer case or the worm devour it, as it would a king's—that need not trouble the spirit within it. Look you! it is my belief that though it takes a dozen strong shoulders to adjust the gravestone over the body as its final coverlet, one touch of the ghostly finger will lift it off to let it take its flight—"

"To heaven, brother?" asked Saverny.

"To heaven," answered Didier. "And it will be heaven, for it is furthermore said that there we shall be as the angels—neither wedding nor parting as happens to mortals."

He sank into abstraction from which Saverny, also grave, did not stir him, up the time of their being taken back to the cell. The jailers on the way seemed a little surprised to see them. It was clear that they doubted that even Rueil would long hold the heir to Nangis

and this stranger, who stalked like a prince in plain clothes.

The friendly jailer stayed with them, ostensibly to arrange their accommodation for the night.

"Any news?" asked the marquis.

"The offer still stands," returned the man, evasively.

"If he cannot go?"

The man shook his forelock and then pulled at it.

"Hem! there might be opening enough for two, but—in fact, the Lieutenant-Criminal is here, in person," he pursued in a most cautious voice, looking round as if the walls were transparent. "And it is plain to us officers that he has a special animosity against your companion."

"Laffemas, is it? And he hates Didier more than me? Humph!"

"They say that he is vexed because of a rumor spread none know from what quarter, but probably from the inn, where all fables originate, that, by reason of your rank and this gentleman's undoubted gentility, a boon will be accorded by my Lord Cardinal—"

"The Red Eminence and a boon to the condemned, in harness! What an odd team! what means this?"

"Oh, they say that, while a pardon is impossible, the penalty is to be softened—"

"Use a silver axe on a block of green cheese, perhaps!" railed Saverny.

"The penalty will be softened into that of head-cutting off!"

"St. John the Decollated who is patron over what is holy here, be thanked!" exclaimed the noble. "You will behold a miracle; I shall

die, blessing the name of Armand Duplessis, Duke of Richelieu!"

Didier had not heard.

"On second thoughts, I suppose," said the man, garrulous at meeting with so lively a ward, "his Eminence has thought that while a decapitation will regale him, sick as he is, a hanging is a low and vulgar sight—puh!"

"The lowness depends on the height of the gibbet," said the young man in good spirits.

"Faith! You can estimate the height, for it will be peeping over the shoulder of the bastion to—"

"Wish us good night?"

Hammering and sawing interrupted him.

"Is that IT?" he called: "Didier, they are at work at our throne!"

"Guardroom talk has it that the change is owing to a lady, who pleaded, with your cause in hand, to the King!"

"A lady! then I am not to thank my uncle—that is, a lady! My coronet on it, Didier, this is our good Marion!"

"Then, you will not try, alone, to escape the axe, either?" said the warder, evidently bent on gaining his recompense.

"For the last time, an' you cannot make the hole large enough for two, none go!" and the marquis gently pushed him toward the door.

Oscillating between greed and terror, the traitor stopped this side of the sill and almost in the noble's ear breathed these words:

"My lord, a secret! If I dare not conduct more than one of you by my way—you two may make a break for it by another way, if you dare—"

"We were put here for over-daring," replied

Saverny. "We will dare more to show this prison a wide space!"

The man reached out his bundle of keys and grazed the greasy wall. "By bearing your united weight on that inserted ring, that rock will shift from its place. The others within may become detached and you could enter our chapel there by a bay. The workmen are building it up as a receptacle for a new shrine in honor of his Eminence's recovery here from a seizure of the gout, last June. Plenty of mason's tools, therefore—it will look forestalled for a breaking-out! planks, a ladder or two, ropes! God helping, you may issue from the west windows and lower yourselves to the street. As the Cardinal enters at the other end and draws all the rabble to him, you may walk out without a challenge!"

As the man took breath after this long speech, but of which Saverny found no word superfluous, he could have embraced him for joy.

"Neither halter nor hatchet!" said he. "I will leave my purse for you at the inn; its host is an ancient retainer of Nangis. Come you any hour to Nangis Castle, and you will find platter heaped, beaker foaming, and a softer bed than you furnished us! Worthy fellow, may you be deputy to St. Peter anon!"

"I am in no hurry for my promotion!" said the man, beaming with smiles as he went out.

They saw that, by the lamp which he had lighted.

"They have left the candle to enable us to write our wills," said the marquis jocularly, and taking up the earthen-ware lamp he held it so as to cast a ray where the faithless turn-key had scratched the stone block with his keys.

When he set it down on the table, Didier, unconscious of the plot, took up his sermon where it was broken off in the exercise-ground, and said:

"I was saying that, of a surety, after the death, albeit the limbs are fractured, the veins tapped, the body sullied by impure rivulets of blood, out of this mangled, bruised, and ensanguined pulp—lo! the immortal soul will ascend, stainless and without a wound!"

"Amen!" fervently said Saverny, "but I—" Here the vesper bell tinkled, and he knelt down beside his companion, joining in his prayer.

While still kneeling, their faces close, he whispered:

"There is a flaw in the trap! a movable stone! *Noel!* we shall leave an empty nest for the Cardinal to stare at! it will give him a final stroke! and may he fall on that reptile *Laffemas* and crush his life out!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SUCCESSOR TO THE HELMSMAN.

The Palais-Cardinal, or Richelieu Mansion, in St. Honore Street, was sufficiently finished for the Prime Minister's residence and carrying on of official business.

The Arabs are right who say that, before the master enters his new house, Death precedes him: he went in far from a hale man.

While all was tribulation around Didier and his companion, constantly under the shadow of ignominious doom, the Ruler of France seemed to be passing away placidly, in his cabinet.

The room was sumptuous, as all the decorations were new.

This untarnished splendor accentuated the contrast with the declining host.

Deep in green velvet cushions, heaped on a vast easy chair, Richelieu's pale face loomed up from the soft depths like a mariner's, partly smothered in seaweed.

His eyes were closed, in coma baffling the stimulants of the best physicians, and the only signs of life were in the attenuated hands caressing a kitten on each knee, mechanically done, while two others frisked, in a subdued manner (instinct telling them it was a dying master) upon his sharp shoulders under the violet cape. It was a season when the Cardinals changed their red to this shade, and not because he had promised Laffemas he should attend the execution of Didier and his fellow-duellist.

Behind him looked down a set of marble busts, the Roman Emperors, a present from Cardinal Bentivoglio, from niches in a magnificent oak bookcase; but its contents were more valuable: the library at which Malargue had mocked; the binding was of fawn-color and creamy vellum. Most of the books were stamped with emblems of Francis I. and him of Anjou, several Henries, and musty tall folios, scenting of noxious drugs, belonging to the sport-loving Charles IX. A few, rarer still, came from Charles V.'s collection. Precious stones mounted to guard the corners beamed softly, they were uncut; gilding in all stages of brightness glittered on the edges, backs and exposed sides; arabesques, miracles of "tooling," presented puzzles to the ingenious.

Publications of the time, presentations from grateful monasteries and convents, or bribes to avert persecution, glowed and sparkled with newness like the room ornamentation.

Between lofty windows, glazed with large blown-glass panes, two long tables, with their angles rounded and bound with polished brass to prevent accidents where the master was apt to lose his footing through dizziness, were heaped with writing materials and registers; more of the latter were piled against the legs on Turkish rugs on the waxed floor. An enormous fire of sweet-scented wood blazed in a capacious mantel-place, of Faenza and blue-veined marble, representing a combat of Centaurs and Mermen. The Richelieu arms, enamelled on bronze, showed in the rosette in the centre. This warmth was for the invalid, since the autumn was not cold.

Upwards of ten or twelve secretaries toasted

back or shin, as the case might be, seated around these tables, their quills squeaking and the linen paper crackling in the heat under their nimble hands. They were copying despatches, transcribing scarcely decipherable reports by useful but illiterate news-gatherers, and recording important articles, marked in the original with red lead, in the huge registers.

Between them and the ruler, another table rose, smaller, fitted with drawers having locks, where five or six superior writers worked at making cipher messages and transcribing them intelligibly, or carefully framing letters to be commended for elegance at foreign courts.

Still another table, supplied with a cushioned stool and an elevating top which enabled the writer at it to stand or to sit as he preferred, stood a little aloof; instead of diplomatic documents, map or plan, it showed a miniature stage with appliances complete, together with tiny puppets which rolled to and fro in grooves on balls; it was partly obscured by piles of the handbooks sold at theatre-doors at the period, manuscripts, and particularly a collection of sheets, dreadfully scribbled over with corrections, marginal suggestions, and sketches of costume; this one had every page headed, as though the author felt pride in the word: "MIRAME (Tragedy)."

The secretaries smiled at their master finding solace in play-writing, but none of them were ever to know what Father Joseph alone was in the secret of: "*Mirame*" was the anagram of Ramire, and the great Cardinal's first love was its heroine. Alas! one may love in later years, but the love of forty is far from that of twenty-year!

In the south corner, where a port-hole-like window gave a peep of the old part of the Louvre, buildings between having been demolished, upon cushioned seats, sat kittens of all colors and variety of fur, but the Persian predominated; one cat from southern England was noticeable for having no tail; these feline curiosities were presents to the great Minister, whose favorites were cats. He liked them for their independence and asserted, none ever knew whether in belief or to hoax the credulous, that their superabundant electricity benefited the person stroking them. If true, he was a forerunner of "the Stroker" of a subsequent date.

Others of the pets slept in padded baskets; some were beribboned, some wore collars and chafed at them, inscribed with a clue to the donors; others sat around a china saucer of sop and drew out portions to eat, while growling.

A pretty page, with rosy cheeks, golden hair down on his shoulders, and in a fantastic suit trimmed with miniver, kept the entire menagerie in order with commands in a musical voice and a whip, more ornamental than terrible.

So young and hale, he seemed to be a pleasant *Memento Mori* for the sufferer.

Without straw being down in the ill-paved street, the word was passed to drive slow: all vehicles passed as if going to a funeral. All noise that did escape the wheels failed to penetrate the tapestry, from Utrecht and the factory just set up in the Louvre.

Four or five years back, the Minister had been stricken with fever, which left a deposit

in the veins, said the doctors, fostering the settlement of gout.

Gradually, he had lost through its inroads the cavalier elasticity which had astonished veterans at La Rochelle Siege. He had also lost most of his early friends and comrades, and like the prematurely aged, regarded these removals as so many indications that his joining-time would not long be deferred.

Yet there was so much to do which he had planned!

The thinness and greyness of his locks made him look older; a reminder of the lovelock was in the scanty twists at side of the high forehead, reflected in his portrait, representing full and side faces, hanging at the back of his chair, by Philippe; around it were Italian landscapes and religious scenes, from ecclesiastical friends.

One landscape, a botch compared with them, cherished none knew why, except that it was of his bourg Richelieu, to him recalled the woods where he had roamed with Joseph and with Ramire; it hung over the way, where his eyes, upward stealing, could perceive it and, as his sight failed, enrich the colors and define the outlines by memory's enhancing brush.

On a trophy of arms of the times of Pavia and Ivry, a sword of the latter date was slung as if carelessly; it had belonged to his father the Captain Duplessis; it was treasured as a talisman, and on the baldric was inscribed in Latin the legend which Voltaire translated as: "The First King was a successful Soldier."

Richelieu's high brows were pointedly arched over cavities where at rare intervals that eagle glance shot forth before which the boldest quailed, as on "the Day of Dupes."

His prominent nose stood out the more salient as sickness had sharpened it while sinking and creasing the cheeks. His face was lengthened by the chin-tuft to which he adhered, spite of ridicule, and his mustache was too thin to widen it.

In sum, in this decrepit, ailing patient, little revived memory of the youth who had quitted fame to push through the woodland to offer his hand to the Hermit's grandchild.

He was not so old that he should feel that recurrence of boyhood's dreams which rejoice while saddening the aged, but often of late he thought of youthful hours, as distraction from the ceaseless conflict with the Court, the Queens, the King's brother, the King, from being so difficult to fix and hold, the nobles who hated him, the officials who feared him, the classes which misunderstood him, and the masses who followed the cue of their superiors in receiving him.

There, too, was the financial hydra to wrestle with, coped with ever since he had undertaken the great wars of the era, costly because militia were not and mercenaries had to be hired when the people could not be trusted with arms.

These and his ailment, never relaxing in its assaults, had worn even a Richelieu to the bone.

Incessantly he was haunted by the regret that he had no heir, particularly political, for Father Joseph, admirable as a helper, seemed to have no liking to lead; as for Laffemas, he showed no capacity but for bloodshed and rapine, controlled by a caution which unfitted him as a free-lance captain but adapted him for the law. Without a lieutenant, Richelieu

sighed on his sick bed like an Alexander who saw the realm he had wearily bound together, scattered among strangers and enemies. He fancied that around him circled human jackals, the parasites and sycophants of the Royal Family, their confessors, confidants, favorites and duennas, prowling and casting sidelong glances on the rich quarry on which perched the sick eagle, soon to release his grip upon it.

Recurring to the earliest days, Ramire's image held the foremost place; he strove in vain to perceive her reflected in Laffemas; all was a void where affection should rest; Europe ridiculed the great ruler who consoled himself with—kittens!

"Tiger, he should play with cubs!" had said a satirist.

"This is the twilight," he admitted, inwardly; "it may not be long before night closes in! Poor King! Poor France! 'There is none to guide her among all her sons that she has brought forth!' Poor Brother Joseph!"

He considered the Capuchin the head of his auxiliaries. With all his acumen, his generally accurate summing-up of his employees' constituents, he had not truly gauged Le-Clerc du Tremblay's ambition; he saw but the satrap who did not covet the sultan's diadem.

All at once, Richelieu started and it would seem that the vague thrill pervaded the entire apartment as the least electrical disturbance affects the contents of the Leyden jar. The scribes wrote more hurriedly and the registrars buried themselves more deeply in their volumes. An attendant, replenishing the fire with billets, stirred it with a steel bar, and a clerk, who happened to be in the line

of the Minister and the flames, stepped aside as though flung from a catapult.

"Death is nigh!" said every one to himself; "he has felt the icy current from its heavy wing!"

They esteemed their superior; these chosen ones were not the sort who worked for bare wages or for terror; their admiration for the genius was fanatical and their devotion that of disciples for a saint. They had insight into his policy and they worshiped the sun which dazzled them—while warming and fructifying France; his word, in an age when mendacity was applauded, was to be relied on.

But his shivering was mental; he murmured:

"A son! An heir! Oh, that I had that consolation—that staff in the supreme hour when one reels and gropes!"

His eyes opened! feeling them upon them, the scribes bowed the head.

This glance warmed them with fresh hope; how many times recently had they seen him resuscitated! At periods when the Court indecently rejoiced over the imminent removal of its incubus, these had seen those bloodless lips part to dictate sentences disrupting countries, bidding a Wallenstein change his march or a Tilly spare a city; tenants of thrones were shifted; a son of Henry the Great would be sent into exile, or a mean fugitive recalled to fill a seat at the Royal Council; the plebeian Marion Delorme would be maintained in her little region at Paris while the aristocratic beauty, friend of the young Queen, the Duchess of Chevreuse, would flee in a humble disguise, foiled in every intensely subtle intrigue.

For half an hour, without faltering—on the contrary, seeming to gain force by renewing

his favorite occupation, the Premier proceeded with his correspondence, receiving messengers and despatching them, dilating on several subjects at the same time, like Cæsar, showing incredible lucidity and the well-known tenacity in grasping details.

Then he abruptly fell back, but he finished clear to the last letter and appended the period to his signature like a conscientious writing-master.

"Ange! Father Ange!" he called faintly.

Out of a side-door slipped a page under the hangings, immediately to return with a priest, the second father-confessor, as Carré was the first, with Joseph over all.

Ange had taken a misnomer; he was inelegant, short, thick; his physiognomy betrayed a traitor, gleaner, self-lover—nevertheless, Richelieu had never been betrayed by him, never lost a secret through his chubby fingers, never found his selfishness injure him. Such is the power of genius that even evil spirits obey them; that is what they are on earth for; the good shun them.

"Your uncle," said Richelieu abruptly, "was in the late King Henry's household. He used to say that the King had a foreboding of his death?"

Ange had often told the tale, since it did not commit him; he rubbed his thick but long nose, betokening wariness and acuteness, at a loss what reply to make, now.

"Your Eminence," said he, "there are inner voices which we cannot stifle. Perhaps, John the Baptist heard such while in the desert, yet they were not on the desert." Richelieu said nothing, so he talked on, trusting to please but regretting that he had no peg offered to

hang his address upon. "The lamented King—" with a grimace ill-concealed for, in his eyes, Henry was a heretic, "on the fatal morning rose, saying he felt a pain as though stabbed to the vitals. He even asked his valet—that Jean Laffemas, whose son is in your Eminence's service, our new Lieutenant of Internal Police, to-wit—the King said to him that the poniard-hilt's impression ought to be visible on his side. This is what made him restless and caused the order for the coach to be brought round to the Louvre gates for him to change his palace."

"Give me the potion," said the Cardinal, without commenting.

On a tripod-table, capped with a mosaic of the Vatican artificers' choicest work, stood a crystal flagon and a filagree cup, silver around "unicorn" horn; the preparation which the priest poured out was flavored with *Naffe*, otherwise, orange-flowers, an odor showing that it was compounded by the royal physician whose weakness was in this direction. On hearing the master slowly sip, the kittens thrust their heads to partake with him, and he did not impatiently push their whiskers away, although his skin was abnormally sensitive.

"Did my lord feel any such pang?" anxiously inquired the confessor.

"No! calm yourself. But I have had an odd dream, in the incalculably brief interval between dictating two letters. It seemed to me that from the Papal tiara fell one of its precious stones—"

"Ill omen!" exclaimed the priest, crossing himself and adding the sign against the evil eye, which denoted he had an education in Rome.

"This gem blazed like a meteor, with the reddish-angry hue of Mars, and, traversing the heavens so as to pass into France, narrowly missed striking me, but my broad-brimmed hat rebuffed it and it felled somebody close to me, who, muffled in the crepuscular grey of night, which the star blaze deepened, could not be distinguished before I woke."

"My lord," said Ange, coolly, "you are simply fretting during arrival of tidings from the Eternal City. But Father Carré has but just started with inquiries, we know, and he will arrive before the informal assemblage of the dignitaries who will make up the Conclave and pre-arrange its decision—"

At the door came a tapping such as etiquette prescribes for royal nerves, and which the Minister's failing health substituted for knocking.

"Father Carré!" proclaimed an usher in guarded tones, but in the silence they were adequate.

On overhearing that their strong-minded master had visions, like an ecstatic nun, all the clerks were listening. This return of the freshly sent courier was ominous of a bar to the wheels of some important piece of diplomatic machinery.

"Carré, so soon? What mishap? Never was he set back on my errand!" muttered Richelieu, resting his arms on the chair so as to lean forward.

Father Carré entered rapidly, with a stride unlike the priest's slipped step. He was clad as a rider, and his boots were filled to the wrinkles with dust and blood from the spur-wounds.

He went straight up to the Minister and whispered for his ear alone:

"Your Eminence will please overlook my retracing steps! I met counter-orders for, on the road, was the Pope's deputy! he will present the person whom you expected to see come from Rome!"

"My successor to be named," thought the Minister, sighing; "I fear me it will not be a Frenchman! Misery to my country! A young prince, a fickle Queen, a confirmed intriguer, and—no statesmen! A foreigner over all!"

Not a trace of his repining showed on his face. But he frowned a little; it was the first time, perhaps, when another power, even that to which he was but a sacerdotal subordinate, had blown back in his teeth so much as a feather he had launched on the breeze.

"A Pontifical agent, coming to Paris, in what end?"

"Please your Eminence, he is travelling to Belgium to receive the lace made at the convents for the wedding garments of a niece of Aldobrandini."

"To Brussels, whither Prince Gaston has fled! that Demon of Rebellion?"

"The legate is certainly travelling to Brussels," repeated Carré, toying with his whip, "for I have acquaintances along the road. I heard before I met him that the relays had been prepared for his passage North."

"Who is this envoy to Brussels?"

"His name is Mazarini—one Signor Giulio—"

Richelieu's countenance, despite himself, was irradiated with intelligence. A good player in that great game of chess called Diplomacy, he remembered the least of the pawns, still more the pieces which now and then came forward

and displayed their possible power. He recalled an agent of the Nuncio who had put an end to the Siege of Casale, in the teeth of two great armies, whose clashing he stayed. It was the outset of the good fortune which ended in Mazarin, as he Frenchified his name, occupying that chair which Richelieu was about to vacate.

"The lackey of Cardinal Bentivoglio, our correspondent, his secretary after, his protégé! an upstart," said Richelieu, too aristocratic to forgive this intruder, whatever his ability. "Well, this Signor Mazarini is coming here—"

"He is here! Though his orders direct extreme haste, for the marriage is fixed, and the roads in winter will be heavy, he did not need my suggestion that he should grasp the opportunity to pay his homage to your Eminence. Meeting me, recognising me, I know not how," continued the priest, glancing at his horseman's attire, "he begged me to return and introduce him."

Richelieu was a thorough ecclesiastic, thanks to Tutor Joseph; as politician, he understood how little the priest's *suggestoin* would have moved a Papal representative. In a moment he had taken his course.

"This legate to neutral parts," thought he, "comes to announce to me whom the Vatican wishes to see in my stead. Besides, he wants a hint how to deal with this brood of conspirators at Brussels. We will be mutually grateful—he for what arms I furnish him, I for a glimpse at my successor! Oh, that Laffemas had been—"

Carré was exchanging a glance, meaning much in the sign-language, with his brother priest.

"But your own errand?" demanded Richelieu of Carré.

"In the envoy's retinue was the person to whom I was to deliver the message at Rome. He had the advice already in answer, which M. Sublet des Noyers, there, is putting into French out of the cipher."

He had met his master's gaze tranquilly.

The latter nodded with satisfaction.

Thus emboldened Carré concluded:

"This messenger went on to Father Joseph, who is at his monastery—"

"I know."

The Minister left the occult plotters in his friend's hands, assured his interests were safe. Again he nodded and this time spoke:

"Take this other letter with it. To him!"

Carré fidgeted a moment while the secretary finished the translation, took it and hurried out, as if happy at not receiving a castigation or being further delayed.

On his way out he passed the extraordinary envoy of the Vatican, without either appearing to notice the other within the Palais Cardinal. Stranger still, Carré did not appear to look for the letter-bearer from whom he received the cipher-despatch, but who had probably gone on to Father Joseph's residence at his convent in St. Honore Street.

The young Italian representing the Holy See, in little resembled a churchman but this was nothing in a day when religion was a cloak for diplomats and swordsmen at need. It was understood at home that Mazarini had left himself a loophole or two in the vows. In the same manner as Father Carré equipped himself to avoid trouble on the highway, Signor Giulio had donned the semi-military costume

authorising weapon-bearing. His suit was blue and white, not conspicuous under the voluminous horseman's cloak, which he had flung on the saddle-pommel when he dismounted to follow his introducer indoors.

He wore silver spurs, and his baldric, to which hung a fine but no doubt serviceable rapier, was fringed with the same metal.

His complexion was dark and his slight moustache jet black; if he were tonsured, removal of his blue hat with a white plume did not show it, as his raven hair was so arranged as to hide any loss. His eyes were excellent, and no diamond shot lustre more trying to those on whom the glances fell. He was small of stature, but graceful as a southron; perfectly trained in the gentlemanly accomplishments, not unusual in one born to be a playfellow and servitor to the noble. His features suggested luxury; as later they indicated avarice; luxury he adored now like one brought up in poverty; in no other way did he betray his reigning vice.

The French Premier's whetted glance studied this visitor whose tendency to foppery he disliked; too fine were those gloves on plump hands, as too finnikin the suspension of his sword; too fluffy the blue and snowy plumes and the Morocco leather boots, supplied extremely, might have pleased a princess accustomed to velvet.

But Richelieu owned that the eyes were intelligent in no petty degree. He judged that Bentivoglio's footboy must have merited promotion to become that erudite's correspondent, and read and answer his confidential communications to the brother Cardinal. Besides, the Holy See would not select a mere *minion* to

deal with that serpent in the bag of eels, otherwise called Gaston of Orleans, amid his cronies at Brussels.

The kittens, playing upon their master, had started and arched the back upon Father Carré's alarming entrance, but they were not frightened by the foreigner's approach, so light was his step, spite of riding boots and spurs which compelled him to walk tiptoe not to tear the rugs. On the contrary, they purred as he gracefully took a seat—without fencing as to the excess of honor done him—for an armchair was wheeled by Father Ange, at a sign, nearer the master.

But the dullest of the sharp clerks little doubted that His Holiness's carrier-dove, for all his pure cerulean hues and innocent white plumage, did not make a break on his journey to the royal plotter's haunt, merely to repeat formal good wishes and express admiration for the great statesman.

With the speed of statecraft's chosen, knowing when to drop periphrases, the two glided almost instantly into conversation, questions and answers flying across like two duellists' blades, so low in tone though perfect in accent, for the new-comer was glib at French as if long destined to use it, that Ange, if he listened, had his pains for nothing. The only interruption was when the priest offered the cough-elixir to anticipate a fit of coughing, or the kittens, charmed by Mazarin's voice and manner, leaped on him, and allowed his gloved fingers to trace cabalistic figures on their supple backs—those tangible letters in feline language which delight such pets.

One in particular, noticeable for a black patch extending regularly down across its eyes

upon immaculate snow, opened and shut its fine claws and whirred out its pleasure, like a locust.

"How now, Master Harlequin!" exclaimed the Italian, stopping in an important phrase, without impatience and without apology, "think you we are in carnival time because, like you, everybody wears a mask?"

"Except us," said the Cardinal; then to Ange he observed: "Here is a good character—he likes cats."

"He has an enviable disposition," subjoined the priest, who might have had a cue to laud the visitor; "they like him!"

"He who pleases cats, will please women!" added the Minister. "Handle him tenderly," continued he to Mazarin, around whose hand the masked kitten was curling. "Beauséant, as we call him, in remembrance of the Knight Templars' black-and-white banner, is an illustrious feline—"

"Indeed?" said the other, in no way resenting this inconsequential interlude.

"A lineal descendant of Piallion, the celebrated cat of Mdle. de Gournay—"

"Ah, the heroine of the hoaxes which amused Paris," interposed the stranger, to show he was conversant with minor celebrities, if not with their domestic pets, through the *Chroniques*.

"Exactly; and entertained our King, who is not easily entertained—like his brother is!"

"He suffers with the true King's-evil, I hear, listlessness," returned Mazarin. "Hence, since he stands in need of a zest, I snatch at this chance to implore your Eminence," drawing a case out of an inner pocket, "to present his Majesty with this piece of mechanism, unique in idea."

The Minister opened the case.

"Travelling incognito, as I do," went on the Papal legate, "and fresh from coming out of this honorable reception by your Eminence, I may not further delay my mission to appear before their Majesties the King and Queen."

"Quite right. A bride intended must not have her happy day retarded," said the old statesman with an ambiguous smile.

He watched the envoy as a commander of an army watches that specially appointed staff-officer whom he suspects to carry sealed orders to supersede him in a certain event.

"I would never oppose or impede *union*," said Mazarin.

Richelieu dropped his eyes, as if satisfied, on the object within the case.

"It is a pear, carved right cunningly in box-wood, and the stem is of iron."

"The stem is the key, my lord," continued the foreigner as sweetly as if he were presenting a real fruit; "it is the work of a distinguished artificer of Brescia, named Adriano, and he calls it the 'Fruit of Silence.' Inserted within the mouth of a noisy prisoner, and expanded by a turn or two of the key, it distends the toughest jaws, and while, gently applied, stifling clamor, it will, on a less lenient scale, stifle the prisoner!"

The Minister caressed the small but potent engine (which was, in a later reign, to make the robber band using "the pear of anguish" the terror of Paris).

"The Fruit of Silence! Hum! It will interest the King, who likes silence and mechanical toys. But," said Richelieu with a cold accent which froze Father Ange and caused the glib Italian to hem and haw, "it is my duty,

as his Minister, to test the engine before I lay it before him!"

Thereupon, without transition, he returned to their colloquy, and heaven only knows what plots were debated which involved the overturning of thrones and snapping rods of the Powers. Mazarin seemed astounded at meeting the embodiment of true political genius.

"He is the helmsman to steer the Ship of State in all weathers," concluded the visitor, "and better, he will preserve her for the succeeding pilot. He is too ill, and has no self-deception on this point—to leave the kingdom; it is not for himself that the French contingent would sway the Conclave to elect a French Pope. It is our grim Father Joseph! and *They* must be warned rather against him—not his master, on my return."

Enthralled by each other, both as talker and listener, so rare are great men with this dual gift—long was their discussion, far from a passing chat.

Richelieu had divined that here was his selected successor, and though he chafed at having the right of appointment thus taken from him, he had to admit that he knew of nobody worthier. Mazarin was fortified at every point where he "felt" him, as fencers say.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE KISS OF PEACE.

Most unexpectedly, in that palace where the death-like silence almost proclaimed the tenant's sickness, unusual confusion started at the gates and soon pervaded the mansion. It was as unpardonable as a clashing of swords in a royal park. The main doors opened with violence and—surrounded by guards and ushers, too closely intermixed to use their staves and rods—Father Carré again appeared, as if borne on the front of a tempest. He was more disconcerted than when buffeted back from his mission.

"Oh, my lord!" he broke forth in grief. "Oh, oh, my good lord!" His consternation was overcome abruptly and he had the supernatural power to overcome the guards. "Come, come away! Father Joseph! the Capuchin Father is ill—very bad—dying!"

"Joseph, dying!"

The Prime Minister sat up like a Pharaoh to whom in his sarcophagus the high-priest had at last administered the reviving draught which made man of the mummy, while Mazarin sprang to his feet and clapped his hand to his sword-side as though expecting to be fallen upon and cut to pieces. It was the act, not of a guilty man, perhaps, to whom the delightful reception was a snare, but of one who believed he was innocently entangled in a crime.

"My best friend! Joseph! Did you say, dying! My poor, dearest, truest friend and counsellor!" stammered Richelieu, shaking with an immense struggle to overrule the clinging fetters of disease.

The alarm and distress gave him heart—did not dispirit him. He stood up, unassisted, like a captain in a siege, after a monstrous explosion, who hears that his first officer has been slain and all the defence centres on himself.

He stepped outwards three paces, stopping, without resting a hand on the table or on the secretary, Chavigny, who rushed to support him.

"My valet, to dress me!" cried he, with the sonorous voice not heard in that volume for years. "My litter to be ready! Let the two mounted musketeers at the portals be replaced while they ride to bring Dr. Herouard and Dr. Letellier—any great doctor—to the Capuchin Convent in St. Honoré Street. Let all succor be speeded thereto as to me!"

Mazarini had quietly withdrawn into a corner; then, to the door; beckoned to Ange and Carré, and they went out with him, all in a rush of servants obeying the orders. Perhaps, as a foreigner, he desired their conduct to convey him out of the Cardinal's Palace.

The ante-room buzzed like a hive: it was crammed with gentlemen, Richelieu's pensioners, soldiers, servants; all turmoil, bewilderment and a little sorrow—not for Joseph, but in sympathy with him who lost his colleague.

"What does this mean?" inquired the envoy of the priests.

Ange shook his head.

"I ought rather to ask you, sir!" said Carré, roughly, as if his dress gave him a cavalier's

license. "His Eminence in Grey was left with the message, coming in your train, and he is dying—may be, is dead by this speaking—like one on whom a heaven-stone drops!"

"Apoplexy," said Mazarini.

"A man who drinks water!"

"Nevertheless, he has had a stroke or two!"

Decidedly, this foreigner was too well informed on doings and persons in Paris.

"The Cardinal! the Cardinal!" cried a man, in a black suit but not clerical, wearing a smile of joy which strongly crossed the general expression donned as the news spread.

"Who are you? I am the Cardinal's confessor," said Ange, throwing himself before the intruder.

"I am Dr. Thémines, come to receive his final instructions before my departure to Africa to study the Black Plague!"

"*Per Baccho!*" interjected Mazarini, showing his fine teeth, "go with his Eminence a little nearer home! you may study his Prince-ship of Darkness without that journey! *Addio*, brothers," continued he to the priests with a fillip of his fingers, "I spy the outer doors! I will repeat your compliments to the fathers at Douai, Arras and Brussels!" At the gateway, where he mounted his rested horse, he saw the great litter forge up for the Cardinal's transportation. He crossed himself as though it were a hearse, and rapidly rode off, followed by his equerry and grooms, not unlike a military escort.

Not so much as five minutes subsequently, the litter, containing the Minister, was steadily proceeding upon the broad shoulders of porters, picked from the "Strong Men" of the Markets, to the Capuchin Monastery.

When all their speed brought Richelieu within its cold entrance, he seemed to have arrived too late. His beloved and devoted adherent lay inert on the abbot's large but coarse bed, no better than the fraters' pallets, to which in his austerity he had inured himself.

He had fallen down in his room, study and parlor in one, as Carré reported, and they had placed him where he passed his last sleep to sleep his last.

At the Minister's entrance, the monk-surgeon went out, feeling his presence was doubly superfluous.

But Thémines had taken Mazarini's hint. He accompanied the Minister who approved (as he stood by, panting after the ascent up one flight of broad stairs, on his arm) the volunteer's trying the Capuchin's pulse at wrist and breast.

At the door, Carré shook his head ominously for enlightenment of the followers who lined the passage and steps.

"His heart beats," said Thémines, "but the side is dead to the right. I call this apoplexy," in a loud voice, "and the third stroke!"

As if reassured by this dictum, which was overheard by many without, Carré went away and closed the door.

The letter in Joseph's hand when he fell stricken, lay on a desk-table. Unable to help since the Breton delivered this sentence and attended to the patient with imperturbable concern, the visitor examined this paper. Nothing more innocuous—even extraneous to a shock. Just one of those gossipy letters exchanged between priests when correspondents from an early age after being fellow-seminarists. The monk of St. Maria del Monte sent his patroness's blessing to his brother of St. Dom-

inick and recited the Roman quidnuncs' prattlings. A battered torso had been unearthed, a noted painter had finished a painting yet to be famed, this shrine had a new lamp, that was heaped with votive offerings for a miracle, in short, all that beguiled "the Mistress of the World" was mentioned, but of politics not a word.

It was not a cryptogram; in vain did the Premier, proficient in secret writing, endeavor to see a meaning in words picked out and peculiarly rearranged.

"Then, why a special messenger to bear this nonsense, in the Papal agent's train?" he puzzled, terribly frowning.

If the letter were unassuming and non-mysterious, its seal was massive for its simplicity; out of the broken wax projected a familiar emblem, a lamb in lead. But the churchman took it out carefully and scrutinised it as though it were the key to the dark problem. He had become too interested to heed the apparent corpse which Dr. Thémines was resolutely trying to resuscitate.

From the cold lips came a sigh.

Richelieu turned round as though a serpent had stung him.

"The veins are turning blue," remarked the doctor; "this is a vegetable poison."

He said this in a low tone, with a kind of professional enthusiasm, totally different from the matter-of-fact one in which he had publicly announced "Apoplexy."

Richelieu bit his lip, leaned on the head-board of the bed, and with the other hand silently extended the letter with its broken seal and the metal image.

Thémines examined both, seemed to collect

memories bearing on such an incident, referred to the dying man with a look, and pronounced:

"My lord, this man is slain by an alkaloid of the poppy plant, very subtle and concentrated. This *Agnus Dei* is in some way impregnated with it, or haply it is the minute phial which contained the quintessence. He has pressed it to his lips and so imbibed the deadliness. Science provides no remedy."

A cry without: "The doctors! room for the Cardinal's physician! room for the royal physician!" made Joseph stir.

His lips seemed turned to lead, in color and solidity, but he spoke intelligibly if with difficulty:

"Armand! good! let us be alone, my son!"

Thémines did not immediately obey the kind of order: Joseph's desire always was a command. He had opened a leather case in which were surgical instruments and sundry tiny phials. One of the latter he held out to Richelieu, saying:

"Not a counter-poison, but it may give a short renewal of the lease of life."

The Cardinal in Red took it, and allowed the doctor to retire. At the door the latter observed coolly:

"I shall keep my brother-ravens at bay! They are useless here. Enough for my head to be at stake over this secret."

"This is a man!" said the Minister. "Do so!" The door shut. "This Thémines will efface the blood-blot from my brother's death-wound! inflicted by his father."

Father Joseph approved of the isolation with a sparkle of the eye; he said in a voice something stronger:

"My dear Armand, your pardon! Give it with

the same promptitude you showed in hastening here."

"Anything!"

"You know how, long, long since, I determined that nothing should trammel you in your elevation to the chair of State. Love of any kind would have hampered King Henry the Fourth's project—paternal love no less strongly than others."

"Paternal love!"

"Have no doubt on one thing! Ramire bore you a child—a son—"

"Yes! but it is—"

"Laffemas be accurst as an impostor and a murderer!" vociferated the Capuchin with incredible force, but the doors are solid in conventual buildings.

After this outburst of un-Christian feeling, he writhed as if remorse had gripped him and tormented him.

"Norbert, an impostor—Norbert has murdered you, my sole adviser and firmest friend!" furiously began Richelieu.

The moribund thrust out his lips in contempt.

The other feared a relapse. It was apparent, besides, that the poison was mastering the unfortunate man in all life's channels. The Minister held out the phial Thémînes had ready, in times when odd diseases were freely ascribed to drugs, but Joseph hesitated.

"Whence comes it? what doctor, you ask? By name Thémînes, his father slew Henri in that duel; but, since, I have been generous to the family. I foster this man, by your introduction, to carry out a noble project. A Breton's brain is not a soil in which ingratitude flourishes,"

Joseph took the counter-poison in a long draught, without further cavilling. He had studied Thémînes. If not relieved, he was refreshed to continue his relation.

"Jean Laffemas dared not aim at my life," said he in a faint but steady voice. "This is work of a more audacious hand. Yet he may have suggested this attack through Cheret, who might tell him to whom to write at Rome. Cheret must have pierced the mystery of my correspondence. But Laffemas has murdered, with a poison little less deadly and insidious than this—oh, what anguish! but I must say on. Laffemas, at Blois, murdered one he believed to be his grandam, a second mother to him. The recital is in writing—all that the seal of confession allows. There, in the press in the north wall. Here is the key. Take the account and use it as a scourge. Well, you can punish him; surely heaven was never so untrue in its teachings as to make your heart throb paternally towards that villain. No; Ramire's son is an obscure gentleman whom no one has patronised, save myself, and I durst not let his prospects be guessed at by him! The eaglet would have soared straight to the sun! It is the antagonist of Saverny's lord, in that combat bringing their necks to the halter."

"Didier!" cried the hearer, who had ransacked the clothespress in the wall and scanned the documents relating to Didier's birth, bringing up at Blois, Joseph's attention to him, and his duel. "My son is this Didier, whom I seem to have particularly persecuted?"

Joseph twisted and turned, gasping like one whose heart is a source of torture, and pressed his side like an African juggler-doctor manipulating the haunt of a demon.

"And it is Laffemas who is charged with his execution! By me, too!"

He turned as though to dart out of the room.

"Armand, forgive me! I thought of nothing but the welfare of France and your glory!"

"But my son, condemned by me, after the King would have spared him—relenting for an old man's tears and a woman's prayers! Oh, Joseph, the patriarch felt no keener pang when he bared Isaac's bosom for the sacrificial knife!"

The dying one saw that rarity: a tear in Richelieu's eye.

"Blind one, that son would have been a power the more to me! And, at my death, a consolation! Now I leave neither name nor remainder on earth!"

"Mayhap I advised you badly," sighed the monk, but obstinately as if unbelieving. "But forgive my error, and all else. I am thus punished for keeping a secret from you in which we should have co-operated. But I doubted that you would wish well to a rival ambition! I planned to become Pope that I might aid you with your temporal kingdom, while I ruled the universal spiritual one. They have annihilated the hope, and made me carrion! but I forgive! Armand, no more secret executions! fewer still of the public ones without public benefit! Preserve life—so dear, so impossible for man to lengthen! France will need every son of hers in the approaching epoch of disrapture! A child king, a minister who will ally himself rather with the Queen than the virile parties! I foresee such miseries! O God save France in the chaotic time at hand!"

"No more revenge, say you?" said the Premier, "not upon the asp warmed in my breast

and who springs upon my son for his dear life! My son! oh, my son! No more revenge when you are brought low, cut short in your mighty ambition, which I misprised, by perhaps the same ingrate? But what engine slew you?"

"My own lips! my foolish gratitude to the demon of Ambition! In my joy at receiving the news apparently crowning my operations, I gave the Kiss of Peace upon that Agnus Dei, token I had won my last opponents over! The script meant nothing, but that was token that I could name the candidate sure to be successful at the next Conclave!"

"The blessed lamb was poisoned!" groaned Richelieu, crushing up the leaden toy in his grasp with vigor of repugnance; "sacrilege! They shall burn at the stake for this!"

"And I," moaned the Capuchin, "who for years have drunk water of my own drawing, eaten eggs of my own boiling, culled greens from my own gardens! I, fool, fool, triple fool! I kissed the image, and I die, my poor Armand, like a rat in a cranny."

His self-blame at his single oversight seemed to redouble his sufferings.

"Hark! the doctors are wrangling for entrance!"

"Go! leave me, to save your son! he is a noble fellow! who has borne his miseries manfully! but do not balk his love! remember your unhappiness from my banishing Ramire! save him and on the confession of Dame Laffemas, convict that monster!"

"But you have lingered long—that doctor said this was a counter-bane!"

"If so, he was deceived! I was doomed! *They* reckoned on my taking off!"

"Define the 'They!'" cried Richelieu, with

fury, "and by all my hopes, based on that restored son, if heaven spares him, I will—"

"No, forgive Them, as I do."

"'Shall not Zimri die who slew his master's son?'" said the Cardinal, in Latin.

"*Memento, Domine!*" sighed Joseph du Tremblay, as if the ecclesiastical language prompted him in prayer. "'Princes have persecuted me and wounded the heart within me,' but I ran the furrow that the harvest should be Thine, Lord! Deliver me, O my God!"

"And He hath said: 'The Gates shall not prevail against thee!'" muttered the Minister bitterly, wringing his thin hands as he contemplated the statue whose blue lips scarcely parted.

Feeling his weakness, he, called almost the Omnipotent among men, felt his wrath like his sorrow abruptly fade; he joined involuntarily in the dying one's prayer, when, suddenly, as though their united supplications brought on a miracle, the supposed corpse gained color on the blanched cheek, the lips ceased to be swollen, and a shivering, not horrible but like a healthy thrill, pervaded the wasted frame.

The Capuchin flung off the bedclothes, rose around, upon his sharp knees, and moved on them along the bed to the headboard. There he drew himself upright by his hands, steadied himself with one of them, for he began to turn rigid, and extended his right hand with the fingers partly open. As if he were at a window, gazing on a multitude beneath the ledge—the window of the *Benedizione Loggia*—he made widely the sign of the cross and cried in a voice so loud that it echoed down the corridor almost to the street doors:

"May the blessings of the Trinity befall ye and dwell among ye till everlasting!"

"Amen!" cried Richelieu in a voice almost as lusty.

He reached forward, but the stiffening frame fell without the least animation in his embrace. The shock overpowered him for he, too, lay motionless on the couch, beside his preceptor. Slowly, he disengaged himself of the weight.

"Happy man!" sighed he. "For a space, he believed himself Spiritual Lord of the World!"

He tottered towards the entrance, but at random, not remembering where he was, or what had passed. He was merely endeavoring to elude this spectre which had torn his Right Hand from him and darted a rankling arrow into his breast. Suddenly a prodigious sentiment overcame the paralysis.

"My son! he assured me that this Didier is my son! that Laffemas is deceiver and murderer!"

Instantly he recovered not his natural coolness but preternatural condition. Abnormal strength became his.

With cleared eye, steady step and a nimble hand, he felt in his bosom where he had placed the papers telling Ramire's sad story, blessed that name as if a saint's, and muttered:

"This dog Laffemas knows his fraud. How he must hate the true heir! And I persisted in trying to overrule Providence that softened the King—it is I who sent Joab to Absalom and said: 'Deal not gently with him!' However greatly I have sinned, on this earth, in fulness has come my punishment. But the pride of my heart is humbled. Lord, be merciful to the meanest of Thy servants!"

He opened the door. On the other side, the gathering was devoured with anxiety, since they heard Joseph's tremendous outcry.

All were astonished to see their master so firm, strong and calm, for they knew how deeply he loved him who certainly was no more.

"I have lost my main support," said he with fortitude. "To the lamented dead let all the honors be shown, due a prince of the Church!

Joseph was, it appears, a Cardinal.

"My litter!" he called in his astonishingly strengthened voice. "Send couriers along the route to Rueil! to relay the bearers. I must arrive there as though I rode on the morning's wings!"

The monks were amazed that the more robust of the two Cardinals should have succumbed; they obeyed their part of the instructions. Meanwhile, Richelieu walked out to his litter and entered with Thémines, whose arm assisted him. He dismissed the other physicians, with thanks for their promptness.

Inside the curtains, he whispered to the Breton:

"Make your report on the lines which incriminate no one. Do not let us besmirch the Church's garments by crushing a reptile on them."

At a mansion, the litter was halted. On hearing that it was the residence of the Chief Judge of the Supreme Tribunal, Thémines believed that the Minister had reconsidered his clemency. The order was sent in for Laubardemont to come out. He was an epicure; he was called from a banquet, for he was wiping his mouth on a silver-fringed napkin as he appeared in gala costume on the front steps.

Feasting while his master was thought on the brink of death!

Richelieu did not comment on this appearance of unconcern to a patron.

"Go, prepare your report," said the statesman to the doctor. "Give your place to the judge."

Laubardemont, quaking, stepped within the litter.

This looked much like an arrest of the dignitary and his removal to a prison. But only one of his guests, up at the windows and at the doorway, dared to advance as if to inquire, scarcely to protest.

It was a gaily dressed man whom the Cardinal recognised.

"Abbé de Gondi," said he; "mount a horse, for I know you can ride well. Accompany us to Rueil."

The judge shuddered so as almost to shake the litter; but the Coadjutor of the Archbishop of Paris was of sterner metal. He mounted a horse from the saddle of which an arquebusier descended.

"My dress," he protested.

"Will, I hope, suit the occasion! Ange or Carré will conduct the graver ceremony—you, I require for a wedding!"

"The graver occasion!" muttered Laubardemont, more dead than alive. "At Rueil, there is to be an execution, then! Oh, that I had finished that ortolan pasty and washed it down with that incomparable Chambertin!"

Litter, guards and cavalcade, all resumed the march.

In the litter was lamp, writing materials, and legal forms.

"Make out this blank for the arrest and exe-

cution of a traitor," said Richelieu to the judge, who became his secretary.

While he wrote, relieved at it not being aimed at him, the captain of the escort was called to the doorway.

"Cavoye," said the Premier, "take the judge on a good horse between yourself and a trooper. Make the arrest he has the warrant for. Stay that double execution! I shall be with you soon. Let me not tread on your heels before you carry out the mandate!"

Laubardemont had completed the writing; sighing, he was lifted upon a strong horse, partly supported by the soldier on his left, and away flew the three, the central figure more like a prisoner than like a judge.

The monster palanquin followed in the wake of dust they threw up.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A DUEL OF LAWYERS.

It was several hours after sunset before Laubardemont rode into Rueil. He was consoled for the loss of his feast, and the badness of the roads over which he had shown he was no horseman, by his prospect of destroying Laffemas whose position he coveted.

The tramp of his escort and the uniforms had started an impression that it was the Cardinal and little would have caused the garrison to tender him a salute.

Showing his powers to the governor, who knew Captain Cavoye better than the great law lord, Laubardemont listened to the account of the way the two prisoners were bearing their captivity, and reservedly let it rest, only saying that nothing was to be done before the superior arbiter arrived.

Then he set upon the highly personal course he had cogitated upon during his ride.

It was to recompense him for his lost carouse.

"I shall not be able to sit at ease, even upon the woolsack, for a fortnight," groaned he; "so some one must line the cushion. My colleague, of course, poor dear Norbert, whose vulgar 'Jean' is used very freely in his indictment! Tut, tut! to think of his falling from grace! Condemned by the sire who—hush! these are topsy-turvy times!"

He was rather embarrassed by Cavoye, ac-

according to private instructions, keeping him at hand as though he were a prisoner, and by Gondi who watched him cynically; but presently he was left to his own devices as both joined the governor at supper.

He declared an interrupted meal always upset him for a week, and cautiously inquired for the Lieutenant-Civil. The latter was not trumpeting his whereabouts, but a valet, with a menial's scent for disaster and instinct to cling to the rising meteor, imparted the secret that the great functionary was in the chapel, waiting for a priest, probably to officiate over the execution of the two culprits.

"But, my lord," went on this communicative domestic, seeing he pleased, "he also expects another visitor. A lady, who is stopping at the Cross-Keys."

"A lady!" and Laubardemont pricked up his ears.

"A beautiful lady! from town, one can see that! I have a shrewd suspicion that he intends to economise on the priest, making the father perform his marriage ceremony under the head of the mass and shrift! After all, it is only another kind of halter!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed the judge. "Eh! what under-work is Messire Laffemas planning? marriage! who would commit that false step with this ungainly, treacherous fellow, and one who is about to lose his rank, his fortune, and, I begin to believe, his head? Would Richelieu slay his own son? marry, he would! a brood of them if they hampered his advance!"

Calling for a description of the supposed bride, he recognised the famous Marion.

He also knew that Laffemas had dangled about her, in Paris, and that, since, he had

oscillated between Chambord and Blois, where it was rumored she had been seen.

"Can you show me, quietly, into this chapel?" he asked of the useful lackey.

"Certainly."

"Then do so, and announce me as the priest—no! do not announce me, at all! I will present myself! Under the Law, we are brothers! d'ye see!"

"My lord, it is arranged that his own hand will open a little secret door to the new shrine of St. John on a peculiar mode of knocking."

"My scheme is going on swimmingly—it will be Laffemas who drowns!" thought Laubarde-mont, rewarding the guide beforehand handsomely with gold.

The castle clock was vibrating on the first stroke of eleven when the servant knocked at the chapel postern in the understood manner and silently crossed the yard to go and add his louis to his hoard.

In the meantime, as once before, but at Nan-gis, Laffemas had been waiting with nerves on the strain for Marion's coming, with a favorable answer to his suit. He could not doubt it, this time. He stood, so to say, in the shadow of the gallows, between her and the rival whose life could not be purchased but at the cost of her liberty. Did he intend to keep faith with her? Hardly, for he was not the man to believe in the oath of one whose removal much farther than India would alone ensure his security.

On hearing, for all their caution, the two men's steps in the cobble-stone paved yard, he distinguished that it was not a woman and supposed it the priest and his clerk.

Disappointed, taking a lamp impiously from

a shrine where the beheaded saint held out his head on a salver, he rapidly crossed the chapel floor and opened the small door, as promised by the valet.

On the threshold, advancing to prevent being shut out, a form in black clothes, for Laubardemont had donned a cloak for his adventure, might be for a time mistaken for the expected churchman. But continuing his forward movement, the judge drove the light-bearer before him and flung down the mantle.

"Laub—" began Laffemas, and the lamp would have fallen in his fright but for the other catching it.

By its flare, as he held it now, the blandest of smiles was to be seen on his broad mouth and long face, while his costume, reminiscent rather of the revelry than the bench, almost encouraged his enforced host.

"My dear brother," said the other, "I am charmed to see you looking so blithe!"

He looked round: the fittings were more in harmony with the execution than the marriage.

"Granted, however, that the decorations scarcely accord with a feast of the Church."

"Come back into this recess," grumbled Laffemas, beginning to lose some regained assurance at the singularity of this call. Perhaps the crocodile-like amiability of his brother judge helped to restore his apprehension.

The bay in course of building, not yet provided with image and altar, afforded a nook, with oaken stalls at the sides, and the plasterers' table, on the latter of which Laubardemont placed the lamp.

The rest of the large hall was plunged into darkness.

As the new-comer obstinately preserved silence, Laffemas broke it by inquiring:

"From the city? what news? what of his Eminence? is our patron not coming to see the execution? There is no delay, no respite, no reprieve?"

"I should hope not," responded the other, sitting in a stall, with a grin. "We are not of the kind that see a prey escape without a pang. 'Old Malice' becomes more inflexible as his illness ameliorates. He is less gouty! and the Queen, who was to give a regale to coincide with his parting throes—what excellent Spanish malignity! has put it off. She is biting her thick lower lip with disappointment. Our patron has entered on a new lease since the King went to hunt at Chambord, where Langeley devises new sports, and so leaves the coast clear for our own craft! Well, no one can be happier at news of our lord's recovery than you who hear me, with such avidity," concluded Laubardemont, with a suggestive leer. "You always professed an esteem quite filial for his Eminence."

As the hearer had no grounds for suspecting his collocutor of more than his usual sarcasm and was ignorant of the true state of affairs, he let the quip pass.

"How is the other?" demanded he, suddenly.

"The Grey Eminence? oh, Father Joseph was, as I left, on the point of going on a journey."

Laffemas seemed pleased; but he said with surprise:

"He, the Stay-at-home, who wears the boots off Carré's feet with his messages? But I sup-

pose you mean he is going to his diocese, for he is bishop of some fat see?"

"Better than that—it is published that he is a Cardinal!"

"Ah! then he may be going to his installation—to fill his red hat with offerings of his faithful flock!"

"I do not know where. I know little out of my jurisdiction," replied Laubardemont, affecting not to be inquisitive.

"Which comprises all France! hum! Might he not be going to—to—Rome?"

"Why not?" said the judge, smiling approvingly. "His couriers do not seem to accomplish much by their eternal cantering. Perhaps a principal must accomplish the end in view."

The Lieutenant of Internal Police was reflecting. On the intimation of Cheret, he had written to a confidential hand near the chief conspirators at St. Peter's, notifying him whom Joseph du Tremblay would appoint against the "native" Cardinals' choice. He had expected the answer would be an arrow shot from afar, but, perhaps, to make sure, the victim would be decoyed within reach of a bravo.

"His grey mantle will be dyed red, *à la* Cardinal, indeed!" he mused. "I cannot doubt that he is in safe hands, for I know to whom I denounced him."

His companion was crumbling a bit of plaster between his fingers, with simple curiosity.

"Has this resort made you pious—are you mumbling prayers for his safe journey?" said he, with his sneering tone.

"A fig for Father Joseph!"

"With all my heart! never was I a plaster the richer for him! But, one question, brother! with Pater Joseph gone, no matter whith-

er; the King eclipsed in some chase; his brother wandering in search of an ally to assist his usurping the throne; and—" in a lower voice, bending over to him until their eyebrows almost brushed, "our patron dying, how shall we fare?"

The Chief of Royal Police laughed in his face.

"I am going, too, before France is left without a helm or a hand at it. Immediately on the execution of these two men, who eluded me at Blois, so that my professional pride is at stake—you, a hanging judge will understand—I shall—"

"Would I could leave as readily, but my family—"

Laffemas continued to laugh, insulting.

"Truth, I am married! Well, it is for yourself, then, that the passport to the sea and authorisation for the ocean voyage on a royal ship were procured?"

"If you know that?" began Laffemas, showing a heated cheek.

"A clerk in the Two Indies Company, who is a member of the family I have married into, and thought he ought to evince confidence, informed me of a powerful letter of favor which you carried. It covers the transportation of a man and a—another man—but why not a woman? over the Indian Ocean. Do not mock at my simplicity, my dear friend, at my jumping rashly to conclusions—wretched quality in a judge! but I did you the compliment to suppose that you intended a great and generous act!"

"I do a great and generous act!" Certainly, this exclamation was genuine.

"I thought, for once—I imagined—listen to

me! that you, who had been down to Nangis and conferred with the old marquis, who is rich and influential, meant to contrive the escape of the Marquis of Saverny—”

“Faugh!”

“Still, as you have a soul above lucre! you might be farther impressed by the wiles and entreaties of Mdle. Delorme—”

“Ha!”

“She busies herself for his release!”

“May *Tollard* (the executioner) twist your neck, beloved colleague, for having that idea! I favor that vapid fop! I assist Marion to escape to the seas with him—or any other! I wink at the escape of one, or two, condemned to death! Since you know so much but conjecture so wide of the mark, know that it is I who intend to go to Calcutta, and the companion will be my bride—”

“Another married and happy man! excellent! out there, who would hash up the ridiculous tales which spring up like weeds upon a fair woman’s path of roses! How wise you are, and how blissful you will be! But,” added Laubardemont, very seriously, laying both hands on the other’s shoulders so that he could not move away, “while you are at a distance, who will receive your revenues?”

“I have converted all that was realisable into gold—”

“Oh, that accounts for the draft of Davidet Brothers on their Bombay house, on the amount of which Finance Minister Bullion remarked!”

“What tattlers these heads of departments are!” and Laffemas ground the plaster balls under his foot.

“You are frank with me, as we always are!”

I admire you, man of prudence! Ah, if I were not tied here! But you could not cash all your real estate?"

"My friend, it is that immovable balance which distresses me, and gives me that absence of mind making me such poor company!"

"Not at all—you speak gold!"

"Do you not think that on the ship I shall be tossed more mentally than physically—who will be safe in France if the possibilities you name are realised? What official may not have his papers seized and all, including his friend's investment, put under the great Red Seal?"

"Any of them, except those who, by a far-seeing marriage, have powerful allies in the enemy's camp! I have married Mdle. de Lozère, whose aunt is a lady paramount of Calahorra, that is to say, she is allied to the Queen and Spain by the latter connection, and to Prince Gaston by her other claim. Come what may, I am safe!" and he leaned back complacently in the hard stall as though it were cushioned for a prior.

"My good angel sent you!"

Laffemas grasped the other's hand across the board, looked him in the eye, unusual course for him, and continued with the same rare frankness.

"You are the man I prayed for! I accept your offer! I appoint you my steward."

"Ah!" sighed the judge, in relief and with gladness of lust.

"Time presses, and I have an appointment—"

"I guess! will you have me, to give away the bride?"

"Perhaps, but she and I must have a private

conference first. Can we not abridge the formalities?"

"Between lawyers? certainly. I carry writing materials—"

"And I!"

They cleared the rough boards and laid on them paper and ink; each had a supply.

Laffemas laid a long list by his side.

"My catalogue of immovable property in France!"

Laubardemont's look of curiosity changed to one of avarice.

"Formidable!" cried he, and began to read: "*Item:* a parcel of four farms in Cher, with vineyards—"

"I held it in trust for the Prince of Marillac's four sons; they fell into disfavor at his execution, and as they are dead, legally speaking, I regard it all as mine own!"

"Naturally!"

"Poor Marillac! I presided at his execution, on the Strand, at Paris. They are promising boys, and will get along without clogging land under their feet. It makes galliard spirits to start them in want!"

"They will bless you! 'The Nitre Caves,' at Savonier—"

"Always wanted at a stiff price, for gunpowder," explained Laffemas, who seemed not to be eager for his colleague to get away. "Ah, Bassompierre was foresighted when he purchased those bat-haunts. Poor dear Marshal! I conducted him to the Bastille, and consigned him to Governor du Tremblay's cares. Ah! another tender reminiscence! Those thirty acres of roses at Provins, on the Montmorency Estate; I arranged all the ceremony from an-

cient precedents for the fit decollation of the second Henry, Duke of that name."

"A quarry, from Souvres; farms, Lansec; the Forest of Champmaillard, with right to cut timber of twenty years' growth in perpetuity! Delicious!"

"I arrested every one of those donors and by my kindness secured their regard—and this property, which otherwise would be clutched by the insatiable Richelieu."

"True, some men are sordid! Happy intermediary, and disinterested!" sighed Laubardemont, rubbing his eyes while the other rubbed his hands.

"Good gentlemen!" replied the susceptible Police Official. "None of those I took into custody or marched to scaffold or prison, bore me any grudge. I except M. Jars, who obtained a pardon at the gibbet's foot and, by the mass! cut me dead the next time we met, at a fortune-teller's in Paris! but I prompted her to assure him that he would be taken off abominably and he has never slept a wink since!"

"Hum! this glass factory at Manche is valuable! your own purchase?"

"For a peppercorn, of Bouteville. I weep to recall him! He lost his head, for a duel! Then, the penalty was decapitation—now, we leave the head on to prevent the halter slipping off!"

"The world is getting civilised," remarked the other seriously.

"I read all their sentences, with clear articulation and proper emphasis, so they know quite clearly why they died. I do not hold with those conscienceless clerks who gabble a death order so that a culprit is launched into eternity in doubt why he was despatched thither!"

"I applaud! Oh, more vineyards—and in Champagne!"

"I owe them to Montmorency, too, who suggested to the Cardinal, before they fell out, that the Stewardship there would fit me. I never forgave Langely, who jested that he preferred the wine of my province to *my whine!*"

"Scurrilous knave! We have no time to jest. Make me holder over all this property, and I will transmit the income, apart from my dues—"

"Thirty per cent., my friend!"

"How liberal! I should be content with twenty-five!"

Expert in drafting legal documents, the transfer was speedily made. Laubardemont seemed overcome by the honor!

"One good turn deserves another," said he, sprinkling the ink with crumbled plaster in default of sand. "Are you sure you can pass out of bounds, with your—companion?"

"The chief under his Eminence is master of Rueil."

"In ordinary times," returned the judge, folding up the paper which, he considered, made him sole owner of what it enumerated.

"What extraordinary times are these?" in alarm.

"I do not know. Rueil is not in my jurisdiction—that is, the sentinels are doubled, and Cavoye has come down from town with a reinforcement. It was not merely because I am a royal commissioner."

"I never rated Cavoye friend of mine." Lafemas looked perplexed and doubting.

"But he is of mine. He belongs distantly to the family I married into! Anyway—" seeing

Laffemas force a smile, he added: "Say the word and I will lend you the ring."

"Your signet-ring! what good is that, out of your jurisdiction? eh, it is Richelieu's!—the rattling-stone!"

"Ergo, it will pass any one through!"

"I believe it would pass a lost soul back through Hades. Have you robbed your dying master?"

"I, rob the eagle! I, the harmless, jovial, table-loving Laubardemont, whom the King talked of substituting for Langely, whose jokes grow more trite and tedious?"

"Heigho! *you* may joke, since I must leave so much to you, and go among pagans!"

"Pooh! Marion will console you! many an envied duke in Paris would gladly change his future for yours." 'He slapped him on the shoulder, chuckling.

"By the bye, steward of mine," said Laffemas, apparently at ease, and slipping the token of power upon his finger, while ceasing any longer to listen to sounds without; "what commission brings you to secluded Rueil? out of your circuit?"

Still laughingly, Laubardemont responded: "To make an arrest, of course."

"Who is here? have they decoyed Bellegarde from Chambord?"

"Oh, no! neither duke nor prince! none such have the cunning to choose the Cardinal's own haunt for secrecy!"

"Oh, a pretended Cardinalist?"

"In plain words, a traitor."

"Do you anticipate difficulty, that you bring Cavoye along?"

"I told you it was rather he who brought me along! No, not with Rueil at my back."

"Nevertheless, if it be a personage of consequence—"

"He is, and he is a rich one, to boot!"

"Then let me tell you that the town swarms with strangers—"

"But all Cardinalistic?"

"These old feudal barons have tenants and retainers who follow their lords against King or governors. Ostensibly these bludgeon-bearers come to see the execution—one to be carried out within the walls! To my mind, Saverny's yeomen contemplate a rescue! and they would, being full of cider and mead, join in any attempt, provided they have the fighting they pant for!"

"Though all Brittany came to the beck of Nangis, and he made head against me, I should make my arrest," said Laubardemont with a mixture of the heroic and martyr's airs.

"But you will be smothered by the mob; torn to rags when Saverny raises his war cry!"

"Oh, if that is all, friend, he will raise no cry in peace or war!"

"All these nobles have a call: 'To the rescue of Such-a-one!' Would you gag him? it looks bad—my experience teaches, to lead a prisoner about with a kerchief over his mouth! When I took Montague, the English agent, though a palpable foreigner, the rabble resented his being hoodwinked."

"It is clear you have been absent from town lately! gagging is vulgar and obselete." The commissioner drew a singular object from the folds of his rich doublet. "You see here the latest and genteelist novelty for hushing obstreperous prisoners."

Laffemas stared at the wooden pear which Mazarini had presented to Richelieu for the

King, and which the Cardinal must have passed to his chief judge for an experiment, as he promised to do.

"My friend, you see the Pear of Silence, made by an ingenious Brescian; placed in the captive's mouth, it prevents any noise, any inciting spectators to riot and rescue!"

"Placed in the mouth!" returned the other, with exquisite simplicity in a torturer pretty well familiar with the arsenal of torment of the period, "why, that is too large—at least for France! the Brescians must have mouths like that of Le Havre! that would never go into a native mouth!"

"But thus, when collapsed, see! by the key—this pretended stem is the key—"

"That is different. How marvellous! It is lessened in bulk; but, never will you prevail on me to believe that it would enter a mouth like—yours, for example!"

"It would slip into a princess's—Doubting Thomas, see!"

At the moment when Laubardemont, carried too far by his enthusiasm as a demonstrator, lifted the pear near his parting lips, the auditor raised his arms in admiration, and with a blundering jog of the elbow drove the instrument into the somewhat capacious orifice.

While the victim spluttered and tried to expel the obstacle, the Lieutenant-Criminal gave an expanding turn to the key, though affecting to be trying to disengage it by this stem. In mock horror he drew out the key, saying, almost with tears—they might be of satirical laughter—in his eyes:

"I crave pardon! It *will* go in! by the Heart, it has gone in!"

The dupe made an extraordinary but unin-

telligible noise, while clawing at the gag with both hands.

"What do you say? yes, it does render words unmeaning! Oh, the key? you make the sign for the key? Allow me! Thunder! I have, again, turned it the wrong way!"

Nothing was more perfect than the distressful air upon Laffemas' countenance; brief as was his association with Mondori's troupe, he had profited histrionically; but, somehow, Laubardemont did not believe in his sincerity. Still less was his belief when Laffemas profited by his discomfiture to smooth his arms down by his sides, and bind them thus with his scarf of office. With unsuspected strength the slighter man threw him down on the stones, secured his ankles with an end of rope, and tightened the bonds on his arms. In spite of an evident disposition to save time, he methodically searched his prize.

The judge moaned as the document empowering him to manage Laffemas' real estate was taken from him, and other papers came to light.

"Warrant, 'Executed in my litter on the highway between Chantilly and—' What have we here, scoundrel? Richelieu supersedes me as Lieutenant-Civil and appointed the bearer in my stead? What farther is this? Warrant: 'Arrest and try Jean, *alias* Norbert Laffemas, pretended son of the royal valet Laffemas, for m-m-murder!' I, commit murder?"

Laubardemont shuddered—for if ever murder was in a man's eye, it was plain in those contemplating him with surprise and partly gluttoned malice.

"Never till now did I feel that way inclined? 'The Murder of one Dame Laffemas, *alias*, The Sorceress of Blanchapelle Lane, Paris.'

Ho, ho! 'Formerly, spouse of the woodman Laffemas, of Richelieu bourg.' Zounds, how pat you have it all! I am lost! but, no—I may escape! thanks to the eaglestone! You villain! I was right to suspect you and be on my guard! You had these adders' tongues to sting me, and you slavered me to gain my store! It is you shall die!"

He took up one of the stylets used to erase mistakes on parchment, and felt the point with a coolness which certainty of revenge gave him.

The helpless one saw the blow descending as he heard a knocking at the little door by which he had been admitted. He hoped, for it might be Cavoye!

"Joy! 'tis Marion! at last!" said Laffemas, merely for that instant poisoning the weapon, and bringing it down into the unresisting heart.

Made calmer still by the crisis, he stood up, laid the steel quietly on the board, and wiping his hand on the cloak, for a few drops had spirted, crossed the slabs to admit his expected, and more desirable visitor.

The mantle dragged over Laubardemont's staring eyes, half under the plasterers' table.

Laffemas was doubly delighted; he had rid himself of a dangerous rival and fortified himself in his powerful position. He was to receive the ideal reward of his perfidy and passion. He turned a deaf ear to all behind him. Nevertheless, although the Chief Judge was assuredly lifeless, a sound arose there, slight but perceptible—perhaps, merely a stone creaked in the drying mortar, or a green plank cracked.

Laffemas gleefully opened to Mdlle. Delorme and extended his homicidal hand with eagerness.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"WAS EVER WOMAN IN THIS HUMOR WOODED?"

Long since, the sun had ceased to glide down into the courtyard where the two prisoners exercised. From their heavily barred window, they saw a point glitter now and then until all the outlook became dark. It was the tip of the sentries' halberds as one or another passed along the wall.

They had vainly waited for the commissioner to come, and announce the happy change in the mode of their execution. But as Laubardemont was busy on his own errand to Laffemas, it devolved on Captain Cavoye, or rather he took it upon himself to afford the captives—men of the sword whose fate he deplored—a lightening of their burden.

After the news, Saverny outdid his former self in liveliness.

He ate the supper as though it were the feast from which Laubardemont had been un-luckily called.

"Did you hear?" said he: "the Cardinal may arrive at any nick between this and midnight?"

"It is a supreme instant," replied Didier; "it is meet we should ponder over the sole issue of our doom."

"I am pondering over the issue, indeed!"

"We are about the same age, and yet, granting you have seen most of the world, I reckon myself older in wisdom than you."

The young noble bowed, with his eyes fixed on the scratched stone.

"I accept you as guide. Since you will not try the means of escape alone, or to break out in company, I resign myself, and my comfort is in hearing you exhort."

"I ought to comfort you as, at every step when you might have departed, I have barred you. I challenged you! You were living merrily when I crossed your path. By simple contact, my life thread corrupted yours as a stick of caustic rots the silk. Under my fate yours has warped and snapped. We twain enter into the vale of darkness together."

"I would rather we entered into the gallery of light together! but in any direction we shall march, shoulder to shoulder, like soldiers! It will irritate his Eminence to hear that we died fraternally; for he is shunned by the world, saving his Father Joseph, his Daemon! one who leads him by the nose as that other scoundrel, Judge Laffemas, does by the sleeve!"

"This Laffemas is peculiarly abhorrent to me," remarked Didier. "To think a great man should be cursed with such a progeny!"

"It is the rule: my father was a miser—I am a spendthrift. Marion was probably child of an ordinary peasant. The son of a great man is usually a pigmy! But hark! voices in there, in the chapel!"

"I hear! probably the priest rehearsing the service over us, with his clerk!"

"Go on, you, with your sermon! I prefer it to that voice!"

They heard the rattle of arms; by the tread they judged that the watch was doubled.

"This and the priest between, would have made it more hard to break out," commented the marquis; "we should have to run the risk of two shots instead of one, to say nothing of

the immediate servant of St. John knocking us over with the holy-water-brush! Double guard! we are rising in value since esteemed as gentlemen, once more, who should be decapitated."

Standing up, he drummed regretfully on the block, said to be a door to safety.

"Friend," continued Didier, "for the sake of your race, your quality, and name, have a care not to flinch—not to stumble on the sill of the chamber of which the headsman holds the key—in the shape of an axe. It has so low a door that one who would pass through upright must stand a head lower than other men. Let us go with a steady step towards the blood-clotted block, that pillow, in this reign, of many a good spirit. Let the scaffold quake under us, not we upon the boards. Our heads are called for! carry them loftily, as Herodias carried the saintly one! Courage!"

Leaning against the wall, ceasing to drum the tattoo, Saverny succumbed to his fatigue. Besides, a strange calm had come over him, a kind of contentment after the confirmation by the Cardinal's Guardsman that they would suffer the nobler doom. Escape, Didier had haughtily spurned the idea.

The latter paused on seeing that his hearer had become unconscious.

"What waste to preach courage to him! what is my eagerness to end my misery, beside his cheerful resignation?"

He walked up and down a few turns and took his seat on the stone bench.

"Sleep on, brother! my time will soon come to sleep as soundly, I trust! Oh, that all may become dead within me! that not a fibre of my heart outlasts, to hate what it so fondly loved!"

He, too, seemed to have sunk into slumber, so quiet was he, although, without thinking of it, his eyes were fastened, in their diving into vacancy, on that very stone which the jailer had indicated to the Marquis of Saverny as the only block to their exit.

Could it be true such a stronghold offered such a flaw? was it not well-grounded popular rumor that Rueil was tunnelled and channelled deviously? If secret assassins might creep into dungeons, why not captives steal forth, possessing knowledge of the egress?

Escape! the word had no magic for the wretch whose prison had been the world all his young life. Escape, to where Marion would soon be the town talk anew, the subject of ballad and satire!

Still staring, the wall became transparent. By a freak of the imagination, or is it power making solidity itself melt? he perceived the chapel interior on which he had never really cast a glance! Two figures were in earnest conversation, not far from him. One he recognised and the other he guessed; he thrilled like the bearer of a divining rod treading on a seam of gold, at the voice, ever memorable, of the woman!

"Marie!"

He started up and pressed to the wall, become again tangible. "What is she doing where the priests should stand, repeating prayers for the dead by violence?"

He glued his ear to the stone; no words could he hear distinctly, though a vehement dialogue was held. His weight bore on the granite—it moved! He laid fingers on it at the edge—he clawed it out as a wild beast might at its den. What if his nails broke and

left the flesh bleeding! Other stones still barred the way, but a chink was there. He could peer into the chapel.

At his feet, too close to the wall to be visible, lay Laubardemont, dead; over this space he had a glimpse of Marion. Flushed with feeling, losing her recent alabaster pallor, she was beautiful as he recalled her in his earliest dreams. She was speaking with a man in black whose countenance was removed from his for the time.

"The Judge Laffemas! Lieutenant of the King!" he muttered, aghast. "She meets her latest lover here, with her discarded one in earshot! Oh, she has grown viler than disgust at its height could credit her!"

He noiselessly picked out the stones until all but the farthest and largest of them were at his feet. Huge though they were, they had been adjusted so that a child could displace them.

The faithless jailer was obeying instructions? really the Marquis of Nangis' or Marion's? ah, well she knew that he would not owe his life and freedom to the money of her purse or from her jewels!

It was Didier's influence over her which had kept her hesitating so that she was an hour late to her appointment. She detested her powers of intrigue and cajolery which had to be exercised upon this wolf who had planted himself in the only way.

It was a horrible alternative, but never could the captives break out with this enemy next the wall pierced for their sortie! It was her duty to lull this sentinel to inactivity, if she had not the courage to slay him.

Visions of heroines rose before her, but alas!

for hero-worship, no one erects statues to Jael, Judith, or Delilah! But on her tardy march, she drew that Spanish dagger, thought that so fine a point and trenchant edge required no more force than beats a servant with a fan, and went valiantly to the tryst.

Hearing voices within the holy vault, she was fearful that the prisoners had burst through and were detained by the Police Lieutenant. But almost instantly the voices were stilled. In the silence she knocked again, and it was only Laffemas who appeared at the postern.

He had left the lamp in the recess; the large hall was poorly illumined; she noticed his pallor, tremor and quivering voice, but she attributed it all to his passion.

As he retreated, she followed him mechanically across the pavement, thinking that it was bringing her nearer to Didier!

"*Gloria!* you have kept your word," cried the Lieutenant, almost forgetting the last scene in his gladness. "You accept the terms, eh? Well, that man—those two shall be free! See, the signet-ring of the Prime Minister, before which, throughout France, all, high or low, will make the way smooth and pleasant. They shall pass to the sea, easy as the gull, driven inland by a storm, returns to the billow! And you shall return to your nest, at Paris. Oh, Marion, how sagely your good genius has prompted you to choose me your partner in the new round of the dance! Look at the field of politics, harrowed and furrowed, tumbling down over the old landmarks and heaping upon the high bounds. The throne—rotten wood! the King! a nonentity, whom the taking of waterfowl sufficiently entertains; Richelieu is dying by

inches; Prince Gaston is ready to enrich above rapacity's cold calculation those who espouse his cause! You and I can rule Paris, whoever the next ruler shall be!"

He spoke to overpower a voice protesting in his bosom, remorse that the murder of Dame Rose had not aroused.

Marion let him babble; listening and staring over his head, fancying that now and then the walls undulated.

"Not a word!" said he, recovering coolness at certainty that she had not perceived the corpse in the nook; "you might tender your hand for a kiss to bind our bargain! to one who risks his head for those two insignificant ones!"

"Not here! not within hearing, almost, of my espoused one!"

"These are not walls that have ears, in that sense," confidently returned the chief Officer of Justice. "A crime may be acted out to the victim's last groan, with impunity! it is constructed for deeds of darkness, treachery and heinousness!"

"Do you woo by threatening?" she rejoined, gaining coolness since this took the aspect of a combat and, to do Marion fairness, she was brave. "In a church, hung with black for impending death, do you talk in this strain? You must be one who does not believe in high, just heaven!"

"Stay where you are!" He was frightened lest she should step in where the corpse stiffened, or at his approach the blood should flow. "Hem! I—I think the priest is coming! Now, lady, is it to be the marriage or the death-service he is to go through?"

"Death to all of us rather than union with a

wretch like you! Oh, you must be dull, vile, and infamous to think that a woman—a Marion Delorme—after having loved the purest of men ever formed by heaven, and being purified out of her own knowing by that chastening flame, in adoration—her soul revived by his superb, unworldly spirit—that such a one should fall from the height of her redemption so low as to be picked up by a Laffemas! Spawn of a priest—no, beggar's brat imposed upon a dotard, if I can read such a craven's inner self rightly! how you cower! Torturer in a judge's robe! grovelling *anima* more fitted for a poisonous worm! do you dare aspire to the hostess of princes?"

He seemed to wither in such scorn, but recovering, he hissed:

"Do you boast of your shame, harlot?"

Circumspectly he circled round her, to prevent her entering that cave to which his back was turned.

Remembering that Marion had warned him that she went armed, he had cunningly picked up the stylet to which the judge's blood now glued his fingers. Sooner than she should live to give Didier the last kiss on his road to the scaffold, he would lay her to rest where he had hoped to make her his bride.

"I boast of nothing but having inspired that glorious love!"

"But he will die! Misguided one, this is not the way to save him!"

"Not to save him would I become shameful again! he would not purchase liberty at that price! but you know not such men. His breath has transfigured me—elevated my soul! You no longer address a Marion Delorme, sir! it is a repentant! nothing of the former stray re-

mains, saving her beauty—heaven forgive the wearer of that dubious boon! It wins and it banishes the very man whose happiness it seeks! The love of Didier has sublimated me and I ascend out of your reach!”

He showed his steel; she immediately bared her own dagger. They looked at one another for a moment, but the man quailed; he was afraid of death! Might not this be the avenger?

It seemed to him that one was at hand!

“Lower your weapon,” said she; “let me pass!”

Acting on a new impulse or imposed upon by her grandeur, he put the stylet in his girdle, and asked as he followed her:

“Whither do you go? to sue to the Cardinal, perhaps?”

“Like master, like man! beg of your lord when you are so cruel? I go, sir, to die beside the man whom I cannot deliver!”

The instant she lowered her dagger and was partly passing him, he dropped his mask of submission and sprang upon her like a panther.

He caught her hand, holding the weapon, and held it firmly.

“You have destroyed yourself! I will swear that I caught you in Rueil, armed to assassinate my lord! But, shall I let you go! Only as my bride, as the saints hear me!” He wrenched the dagger from her. “Now, you are powerless! our marriage must be! for here comes the holy man! Life to you all—you see how generous I am! Saverny, Didier, yourself! and joy to me! A kiss upon our pact! I believe in a Marion who will not break her word, and I will set them free! I will guide them both to the outlet!”

Marion was struggling against his grasp; she averted her face not to have his lips come into contact with her cheek; then, suddenly, forgetting all in horror, she hoarsely screamed:

"Help! Didier, help! he has blood on his hands!"

In the wrestling, they had whirled round towards the recess.

Laffemas was shaken by her denunciation; his foot slipped on the red-black slime from under the table and he staggered over the dead body. Marion was still detained by his grip but shrank out of the reach of the poniard. As her gaze rose desperately, she saw a stone leap out of its socket. Didier's flaming face appeared in the opening as the granite block descended, hurled by all his force, upon the Lieutenant-Criminal.

The stylet rang on the pavement as he fell, crushed, with broken wrist and skull across Laubardemont's remains, their blood commingling, as a heap of rubble, plaster and stones showered upon both. Over this heap Didier bounded down through the aperture.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"WAS EVER WOMAN IN THIS HUMOR WON?"

"By my hopes of heaven!" sneered Didier, as he alighted, "the place is fitly chosen for courtship, and the groom, to boot!"

Marion rubbed her cheek where she imagined she felt Laffemas' kiss, like a red-hot brand, and retreated, appalled by this unexpected taunt.

"Did you not hear?" she faltered.

"I heard that you were here to wed that man, thanks to the same priest who was to recite *Ora Pro Nobis* over me!"

She fell uncontrollably at his knees and tried to clasp them.

"Oh, is there ever to be this coldness—this error about one who loves you so dearly? Leave me here, to die! it is enough happiness to have seen you again! Oh, let me kiss your hands, torn by those massy stones! or were they lacerated by the manacles?"

"My hands are not in pain—it is my heart," responded the young man. "Have done! place upon these honest hands neither tears nor kisses. Why do you weep? for the loss of the brilliant prospect that man promised?"

"I am not weeping," replied Marion, springing to her feet. "I forgot that, now you are free, I have no cause to do anything but laugh."

"Free! you may well laugh—this church is but a prison within a prison!"

"You are wrong! this makes you free!"

The Cardinal's ring had rolled into sight, not far from her dagger.

"Thanks! his dagger? I am not going to murder to gain useless liberty."

"I mean that ring! the Cardinal's!"

"His signet! I would as lief pick up a toad for its jewel! Neither to him nor his minion would I owe anything!"

"Yes, yes, you will live! but be quick! It is I alone who will remain here, to meet the priest, the guards, the baffled master! What can they do to one whose heart is crushed, just as you crushed that viper's head with that stone! Pass, with that ring, out into life again!"

Her voice became clear with a superhuman effort.

"All went well. You must have been told of this outlet to be so providentially on the spot. At that little door is a disguise, concealed under my mantle. I have been supplied with plenteous funds—"

"Madam, your money cannot avail me!"

"It is not mine, but the Marquis of Nangis'—Father Joseph's, too! I guessed your scruple! Let the poor old noble see his nephew once again! The guards are many, but not that way, thanks to my accomplice's arts or this wretch's machinations. You can certainly gain the road, and the road is all France!"

"I remember, too, that that man has a passport to quit the kingdom, an order to secure a ship—supply yourself, for the sea is the world at large!"

Between laughing and sobbing, she continued:

"You will preserve your dear life, and, in the convent, I shall dwell so thankful! Listen: Nangis' followers gather at the inn, armed, treason

to the contrary! to hinder the soldiers! Reach the little inn, where a red lamp burns all night, and the farmers will stop pursuit! Let the cannon thunder to tell that you have fled! the country-side is opposed to farther bloodshed! You will be protected on every hand! But, away! God impel you! Farewell! best and sole beloved!"

She tried to seize him and urge him towards the postern. He did not budge.

"Mark, you are pardoned! I went to the King, who granted your pardon, but he, the Man in Red, cancelled the grace! This tyrant is coming whose emissary preceded him but by a little! and to him who follows I wish the same fate!"

Didier had no eyes for the slain; he studied the living as we gaze on a shore from which we sail nevermore to return.

"All is lost if you linger, for—he comes!" She shrieked, for listening on every side like a hunted hare, she heard unusual movements of the garrison; in the street, at a little distance, a ruddy glare of light shone before the hostel, where, under guise of awaiting the Cardinal's coming, the band of sympathisers with Nangis and Saverny, stood, with weapons covered, to assist the deliverance.

"It was well-planned," said Didier, absently.

Marion expected the speech and was rejoiced at it, though the tone was not encouraging.

"Quick, then! ah, this is more like yourself, your noble self, which would not cause pain to any one. You are saved! Go in haste, with all my love, darling Didier!"

"You said something about the road, at the end of the yard?"

"It leads to the hostelry where friends are

waiting. An easy way. You will meet no one hostile, as the spies are maltreated, and cannot associate with the farmers who speak an unknown dialect. The word is '*Savernis* and *Nangy*!' Mark the distortion! Don the disguise—oh! how we shall laugh by-and-bye at your masquerade, thinking of where we learnt such tricks, among the strollers. But, away!"

"Nothing presses," said Didier carelessly.

"What dulness—madness! with death at the door—at all doors save that I point out!"

"It is because you point it out that I do not go!"

"Because I? oh, argue no more, but start!"

"Why have you come to disturb me?"

"To save you!" She gazed on him as on a madman. "What a question to put, and to me, in that chilling tone!"

"You ought to know that many a man has been made mad, by woman!" retorted he with a mournful smile.

"Say what you will about me, to me—but afterwards. Let us go, or go, you, alone! Truly, it will be better! Oh, that clamor! If 'tis the Cardinal, come!"

Aroused by the demolition of the passage and by the fall of the stones allowing no doubt that his companion had reconsidered his resolve and was breaking out, without him, Saverny disbelieved he could be quitted so shamefully. But hearing voices beyond, he cautiously looked through the thick wall gap and beheld Marion debating in this singular mode with her lover. He had the unusual delicacy to wait, though each moment was vital. But as Didier persisted in refusing the boon and he was not himself squeamish, he decided to show his head in the breach. He stopped short, horrified at

seeing the two partly-shrouded and mangled bodies of the dignitaries; their heads were not discernible and he could only guess at their identity upon his surmises.

"Has he killed the priest, and the commissioner? pretty return for his coming to read our abated sentence!"

"Who is this?" said Didier pointing over his shoulder to the marquis.

Astonished at the question, fearful that she was facing one whom confinement had crazed, the woman replied sorrowfully:

"Do you not know your friends? not your companion in captivity? Haste away with him! he will be welcomed by his people, and your rescue will be the surer!"

She warmly beckoned Saverny to enter the chapel.

"Begone, both of you!" she added as he scrambled through. "I implore it, on my knees!"

"For which of us do you make this attempt?" coldly demanded Didier.

For a moment stupefied, Marion speedily recovered her calm, but it was with hurt pride that she rose and responded loftily:

"Is it thus you speak to your betrothed before a third party? What ill-will do you bear me, to treat me no better?"

"I bear ill-will for no one. But look me steadily in the eye!"

She met his gaze unflinchingly. At resuming connection with those glorious orbs which distress had not impaired, he shuddered. Unfortunately, she was too much like the portrait given him by Saverny, and all the ignominious memories, thronging round that likeness like graces about a Venus, kept him frigid. His

searching look intimidated her. Better than the Parisian witch, he seemed to read her, and her story; it counted her host of admirers, and the offerings heaped on her Place Royale altar.

But she reassured herself, reasoning that one who saw so much must also see how well she loved him.

"You behave harshly towards me, Didier, since you cherished some hurtful secret against me. Tell me all, at this mighty instant. Often, evil is dreamt of and misery flows from a concealed cause, for which suppression one becomes grieved. It is not so long, I trow, since I had a share in your thoughts. Has all that passed? Do you no longer love me? Do you not remember Blois—our little room where we dwelt in profound peace and bliss? How well we loved, far from the blatant world's reminders!

"Yet, even there, you were ill at ease! Time and again, I said to myself: 'How sad in one who ought to look his happiness!' It was a delightful time, but in a day—an hour, swords clashed and rang the knell of our joy!

"Dear soul, how many times you said that I was your love, and in what words of flame! that in me nestled all your confidence, and that I could make you anything I pleased. What requests have I ever put to you? You know how often I have entered into your ideas—so, this night, yield to one of mine!"

Spite of his resistance, she clung to him, forgetful of the marquis, who remained astride of the dead bodies as if he slew them in defence of the position. He listened with dread to the tumult at the town bars.

"Our lives are at stake," continued she in a voice that might awaken those dead and thaw

the granite. "With you, come what may—flight or scaffold, and all is sweet!"

He tried to disentangle her clasped fingers and detach her arms from round his neck; to lift her head, with the magnificent tresses dishevelled, from resting on his breast. She retained hold of his hands and drew him down upon a stall; she pillowed her head on his knee even while beseeching him to flee.

She had taken no rest lately; slept not at all; she had been scouring the town to arrange the deliverance, and she was weary. Weary also over his unbroken resolve not to be saved by her.

Saverny was a petrified witness of this combat of love and honor; alone in him of the two men, his heart ached to see her weeping whom he had hitherto seen laughing; never had anyone dared to refuse her lightest caprice! What man was this who could repulse a Marion's strenuous pleading!

She suffered more from Didier's silence than from his dislike to accepting rescue from her. More painful than anything she had experienced was the inability now to extract a syllable from those marble lips; she had brushed them with hers and they had not warmed a jot—rather, they had frozen hers.

"It were more humane to stab her with one of those bodkins next these murdered men," thought Saverny, beginning to hate this stern comrade who afflicted Marion.

Suddenly she dried her eyes as a new light shone in them.

"Die, if you will," said she with ghastly playfulness, "but smile again! Let me see you laugh before—Come, come, I have too long acted on your will—it is my turn to be obeyed.

Shake off the bitterness with which your chains have infused your soul, and speak to me—call me 'Marie dearest' as of old-time!"

"Marie or Marion!" He spoke at last.

She fell back, terrified, thunderstruck.

All was over with her deceit. Had Saverny, grinning there like the demons sculptured on the oaken screen, betrayed her, maligned her? worse, told the truth!

"Oh, be clement, Didier!" she gasped, bowing herself lower than she had to the King.

"Woman," said Didier, in a piercing voice, "this is Rueil Castle, special prison of the Prime Minister, where ingress is not easy. Night as day, the walls are guarded, and the approaches watched. These walls are thick; these locks, miracles of forging. Your tale of a Breton baron having the golden key to open these fastenings is false! Under patronage of what high functionary have you passed the compliant sentries and found out the weak points so that I should be here, and beside you?"

"I vow that Nangis aided me—that Saverny's men await without!"

"You were admitted by traitors, perhaps by the Lieutenant-Civil himself!" He spurned the mantle partly veiling the dead judges. "Nobody rules here save Richelieu, or his representative."

"Then, you did not hear? I—even to save you, to tear you out of these toils—I, stoop to a Laffemas! Not yet do you know Marion Delorme, Didier!"

"I thank you, lady, for what you have done, but I cannot evade the gallows on a by-way of shame. Heaven's hand is in the descent of a stone, who doubts? Look!" he held up her

miniature and rived it—ground it to shreds in his frenzied grasp, “I bruise the cockatrice! I crush its head as I did that of the Judas-judge! and this renegade-turnkey’s, I suppose—our vampire Vizier’s satraps!”

“The other fellow is Laubardemont!” exclaimed the marquis, feeling his hair rise on end at the enormity of the fatality his comrade had wrought.

“My portrait!” sighed Marion, blushing with indignation as if her face had been slapped, as some of the fragments fell to be smeared with the coagulated gore.

“Abide with your partner in this foul transaction! I misread his character if he will have a second mourner! I will go from here solely to the gallows! In perverted justice’s scales themselves, my head will yet outweigh a courtesan’s fame!”

“Do not treat me thus unfairly!” appealed Marion, rising as if more bravely to breast the storm. “Your scorn makes me tremble so that I fear in another instant I shall lie similarly shattered at your feet. Blind wretch! If ever there were a love strong, true and ardent—if ever a man were singled out for perfect adoration from among the chosen—oh! Didier, you were that man!”

Saverny could hardly restrain himself from applauding this outburst which should have convinced the other hearer, but this one responded, with a wave of the hand to silence her:

“Had I been born a woman, and grown up idolised by the whole town, covered with gold and gems, sporting with ordinary hearts as boys play with flies, I would sooner have dug my grave with my nails than deceived a man

who trusted me, entirely, unknowing my true self. I would not have beguiled a soul full of illusions; not have cheated him because he was ignorant; I might glory in worsting—in conquering the wary and open-eyed, but to trick a faithful spirit, to gull a confiding one, to let a chaste and pure eye over-value the flawed pearl—to be so very, very perfidious, false and ungrateful—out upon you, Jezebel!"

Cowering under this invective, Marion made as if to drop at his feet, but the dead were there; she hid her face in her loosened tresses.

"My heart was a distorting mirror, which it would make you laugh to behold," pursued he. "In that you were reflected as if pure, candid, and perfect! Oh, woman, what monster have you changed your worshiper into—one who so long adored at your hem? Who knows but that I should have the thanks of gallants, possibly your favorites, if I spare you and do not crush you on these stones?"

She dared not look towards him; but her wavering sight crossed the glances of Saverny, whom it implored to kill her instead of defending her against his companion's threat. On the rack she would undergo less anguish.

A bell ringing, not tolling, surely in joy, broke the tension. She sprang up, remembering what dread arbiter of this dear life was at hand, so merrily greeted.

"Didier, time flies and the sole chance vanishes. I have no right to say a word to you, Didier, but having rebuked me and cursed me, you can say no more. More than your hate and derision I deserve, but it shows how good you are to upbraid me so lightly, and my bruised spirit blesses you. But I see the frightful hour approach! the tyrant is near you, and his hand

waves the deathsmen on to seize his prey. Do not delay! Flee! You forget all, but the minions of the law have sound memories! Recall that all is prepared for your deliverance. Strike me down—make me a stepping-stone to your liberty! leave me in the opprobrium I merit and to the repentance, my only refuge, but flee, though over my aching heart!"

"Flee! what do I want to avoid but you? my most welcome refuge is in the grave, which happily is yawning!"

The clock struck midnight and the surrounding village churches began repeating the strokes at a respectful interval, as though they durst not offend the Cardinal's Castle by overhaste.

"Go!" repeated Marion, approaching so that his retreat in abhorrence would commence his departure.

"I am not willing," he said, folding his arms.

"Oh, pity!"

"For whom?" asked he, looking round.

"Am I to see you arrested, bound, dragged to the block? A thought which fills me with new agony! Come, let me lead you to freedom! As your servant, allow this! Take me, with all my misdeeds upon me to expiate, and treat me as the rug beneath your feet. Oh, do you no longer know that you besought me to be your wife?"

"Wife?" repeated Didier, incredulously.

A cannon boom was heard and shook the painted glass panes.

"The Cardinal is at his gates!" said Saverny, half-aloud, chafing at this long delay, yet shrinking from interfering where Marion failed to urge.

"This is the high priest who will not wed you

but pronounce you a widow!" drily responded Didier.

Trumpets sounded and drums beat.

"It is certainly the duke," said the marquis. "Well, here goes one out of the net!" he added, recovering lightness of foot and spirit at the dread of facing the ogre.

He skipped over the dead men.

"Brother," he said flippantly to Didier, who frowned as if only now aware of his nearness, "I have had a dream, making me entertain an enviable idea of life. Farewell, lady fair! I am going to try to rejoice my good nunkey! Didier, shake hands before I run the raking fire! may the scarlet arquebusiers be as bad shots as I am at poetry!"

Didier hesitated, but it was impossible to preserve sternness towards this sprite of frivolity. He took his hand and embraced him, without cavil—affectionately.

"You bid him farewell, and have no kind word for me, at our parting?" jealously rebuked the witness, drawing near as though to separate them.

"This is a friend," said Didier, returning, as the marquis disappeared by the secret door, waving his hand in a gesture of farewell, comprising both.

"Sooth! you are too hard upon a woman who has prayed more to all for your deliverance than ever for her soul's from the Arch-Enemy," persisted Marion.

Didier had paused, oscillating between the last pang at parting with the marquis, the black terror of rising death, and a tremendous idea which suddenly overwhelmed his brain.

Marion had suggested it.

"The tyrant comes, this Moloch of France,

whose eyes have gloated on our best countrymen's blood! He comes to see us die, as though death's dart would fail to pierce his sacred robe! Saverny is safe! My life is not worth that jester's bauble! Let me deliver France of its scarlet bugbear, and at least I shall earn such thanks as are due tyrannicides!"

Rapt in this conception, he did not see the poor creature melting into tears at his feet.

"Do you not follow the marquis?" said she.

This entire devotion to him affected him more than before, since, in his mind, he had doubly forfeited his life.

Was he to go forth to win a people's blessings and not let this one poor heart cherish a little relief after all her exertions on his behalf, with so paltry a return? He could no longer preserve a brazen brow after steeling his broken heart to execute a murderous resolve.

He stooped, opening his arms, and spasmodically lifted her upon his bosom.

"I am going out to certain death," said he, "but I go with a two-fold joy. As a patriot, I rejoice at the mission charged to me, and as a man, I rejoice that after all I love you. The man who has not loved, even an unworthy object, quits the world as incomplete as the still-born. To love is the supreme gladness!"

All gloom fled from his face; a glory seemed to emanate from every feature; she started from him in the amazement succeeding her bliss at the revulsion.

He was all she had judged, then; he could not die without pity and forgiveness. Whatever she had been to others, "Our good Marion"—such was their favorite epithet—had been to

him ever kind, cheerful, affectionate and devoted. If she had kept back her previous career, it was for love of him—from fear of paining him. He had placed faith in her, and, she knew, she had never imperilled it. This dead man at their feet, that fugitive over whose fate she felt no concern, they were testimony that she loved but once, and its object was here.

Another reflection softened him. Like himself, since her origin was humble, her mother, like his own, had not been by to guide the infant steps; her father had not led her in less tender years, and guarded her from the temptations crowding on a beautiful maid.

At his last hour, the earth seemed to fade from him, and speech became sincere as before the August Tribunal.

“Marie, my love, my wife!” he cried, feeling that her soul, become innocent anew, would meet nowhere aught so exalted. “Hear me as I forgive you, in the name of the Power who hath alleviated dissolution’s pangs by pointing out how its inevitable course ends in glory.”

She vainly tried to show her gratitude for this pardon, for her voice was stifled in sobs.

He was kneeling to her when they heard, at the main door, the musketeers ground their heavy guns and the officers draw their swords.

“It is my turn now to beg your pardon,” said he.

She lowered both hands to lift him up, without a word, but her recovered smile proved that she would not hesitate.

“I was the wicked one. I am the scourge by which heaven smote and lacerated you. Weep for me, though others may laud my death! I go with the huge remorse of having caused you sorrow, Marie. With your lips to mine, my

ever-dear Marie, say you forgive me!" continued he, enfolding her to his heart, no longer cold.

Her rapture was beyond utterance; the phrase in which she strove to exhale it was unintelligible. She swooned, and sank out of his arms.

A door opened, at this juncture, but it was not at the main entrance. An inner one from the castle admitted a stranger, accompanied by Saverny—the picture of consternation.

"Forgive me, my lord," this stranger was saying, "but you took the wrong turn. But nothing presses! besides, I desire your company."

Didier had caught up a stylet; he advanced but stopped, thinking that he had seen this speaker before.

"The priest," said he, for the intruder wore a cassock over a riding dress.

"A priest," replied the other; "do you not recognize me? M. Didier, I am that Abbé de Gondi who was your second in a little affair on the Pont Neuf. I am come, not for the dread errand that you assume—natural the error! but to second you again in a happier meeting!"

He bowed to Marion who was as much puzzled as the two men. But she well knew the Coadjutor of the Archbishop of Paris.

"Let me marry you! The lady will have a fresh plea for the Cardinal's mercy on behalf of her husband! Monsieur will be my clerk."

"I?" ejaculated Saverny in horror.

Never had he passed such a nightmare. Stopped in his wandering by Gondi, he had let himself be led back, fearing the worst. To be

a priest's clerk, at a wedding, and that, Marion Delorme's!

With the ease and speed of practice, Gondi saw that the articles for the marriage were ready, thanks to Laffemas' prevision. He lit the tapers, and performed the service for the astounded Didier and Marion, while the town was echoing with the music, shouts and clash of arms over the Cardinal's arrival into Rueil.

In their blissful amaze they seemed oblivious of the clamor.

The vaults reverberated, but the four were calm, Saverny having caught the lofty contagion. In giving the ring, Didier thoughtlessly handed the abbé the signet of the Prime Minister, at which he smiled scarcely perceptibly in surprise.

Meanwhile the noise at the main entrance continued where the soldiers had remained; lights flashed; weapons ominously jangled.

Was this a device of the cruel Cardinal to make death more awful!

Gondi uttered with unction:

"Those whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder!"

Both the great doors were flung open.

Armed men marched orderly within, their steel flashing in rich torchlight, their matchlocks reeking, to form the animated background to Captain Cavoye, who strode upon the black and grey flags and said:

"You are the person named Didier?" He did not even look around for his companion in captivity, and, stranger yet, appeared not to feel any shock at seeing the marquis beside the priest.

But he exchanged a rapid glance with Gondi, who said quickly:

"It is M. Didier, and this is his wife! I pray you deal gently with a newly-made wife!"

"Come," continued Cavoye, hiding any emotion in the frowning grey brows and the still black mustache. "I am to lead you before his Eminence who is at home in Rueil."

Didier had let Marion sink to the floor, where he drew an altar-cloth over her.

"Pardon the sacrilege," said he softly to Gondi. "This is a poor martyr eager to end her days in Mother Church."

The abbé came over and took up Marion, in the wrapper, for which act Didier bowed to him.

Saverny had profited by his being ignored to slip behind the reredos and make a second attempt at escape, in which he was more successful.

"Captain, take me," said Didier, smiling to himself at this conduct shortening his road to his new goal. "I am wounded to the heart by love, and I am content to die, for it is incurable!"

He placed himself beside Cavoye, who waved his sword for his men to surround the prisoner.

"They make no to-do about the marquis, who has slipped out," commented the last, with a smile. "And they fix such undivided attention upon me that they do not search and discover those dead. All goes well! I, alone, am to meet the oppressor!"

In the yard, the gates had been opened to the townsfolk's amaze, since the castle had always been a sealed abode; and a multitude had gathered. A greater number streamed along the road to greet the Master of France; these saluted Didier, with many an eye wet with

sympathy, and many a hand held up to shake his, if the guards had permitted the act, while the other held the cudgel.

"You are come to see me go to my doom," said Didier firmly, "bear witness that I did not flinch when eternity sounded for me!"

EPILOGUE.

Marion awoke from a sleep seeming very long. She looked around. Didier's pardon had so uplifted her that she forgot in what sombre circumstances it was accorded.

She was alone in the chapel but for the abbé who was praying, not for her but over the corpses, which he had discovered.

Not far off the joyous music continued, marred by enthusiastic shouts. In a breath she recalled all.

"The wolves are howling over the prey!" said she, rising and wringing her hands distractedly. "Those good-men will go home and tell their wives and little ones of the execution, and feel no shame that they let the crime be consummated! Why did not the captain's sword pierce me before its shadow hovered over you, oh, my beloved, on your march to the block!"

Gondi rose from kneeling, and sprinkled holy water profusely about the corpses.

"Madam, it is never too late," said he. "Nothing has been done yet. The Cardinal-duke slowly draws near. There is yet time to ask grace of his Eminence for your husband!"

"Husband! that was not a dream, then?"

The half-hour after midnight rang.

At all events, Didier had lived into another morning! Gondi wore the ecclesiastic's and

the politician's passionless face but his speech was kind enough.

"The Cardinal-duke's grace?" repeated Marion. "You are right! He is a man of God! God's man over this kingdom, and he will hear my wifely plea, will he not? He may repent that he revoked the King's pardon! He is an old man—a sickly one—so near the grave, he will rather drag another back than push him in! say you not so? The good Cardinal, the great Minister, he will overlook this offence, since the young man has suffered so much already! Take me to him, good father."

"Go! no one will obstruct you," said the Abbé of Nôtre Dame. "I have to stay and pray here, for blood has stained the fane. This is no longer a house of God. It must be consecrated anew. Go, in faith, daughter! If that young man is not to lead you into the home of happiness, turn you, as he said, into a House of Peace!"

Marion had not listened to all his sentence. Darting out of the chapel, crossing the yard, and finding all issues unblocked, she rushed along the street.

The black drapery was let down, after masking the breach for the litter's passage; the gap yawned in the night like the mouth of Acheron.

All the illuminations had gone to greet the distinguished Lord of Rueil.

Soon Marion saw the gigantic litter lumbering up the way and almost filling it. The golden ornaments on the violet cloth little relieved its gloom. Around the sturdy men who bore the long, pliant ash poles, marched foot guards, with horsemen outside of them; all tramped with jauntiness as if to show the rustics that

they mocked at the toil with the honor of it to enliven them. Torches in many hands cast brilliancy on the scene. The music was so gay that the Red Robe seemed coming to nuptials.

Marion's elated heart sank on beholding the retinue. He who forged that heavy diadem under which Louis tottered, was advancing like Alexander. Never in Paris had his might struck her as so lofty and unchallengeable as in this village by night.

As she stopped, a well-known voice whispered in her ear:

"Cheer up! Let us together accost this tiger in the travelling *antrel*! Zounds! it will be a stony heart which resists our double enfilade, look you!"

It was Saverny. The generous youth had not accepted his safety. He had sworn to be at Didier's execution, and he was returning to stand beside him, despite Brichanteau's remonstrances at such folly.

Already the cumbersome vehicle was near. It surged upon them like a galleon on a breaker to capsize two petty skiffs.

Suddenly the curtains were parted on both sides. Unlike the veiled divinities of the East, Richelieu feared not to show himself to the people, even though they regarded him as an oppressor, like their betters.

Saverny on one side, and Marion on the other, as they knelt, overpowered by the invalid's majesty, raised their voices:

"I am the Marquis of Saverny, and out from under mine own doom of death, I crave the pardon of my antagonist, the gentleman named Didier!"

And Marion's cry, in a silvery voice, was clear:

"In the name of our Christ All-merciful, whose image glitters on your breast, and of your race, my lord, pardon for the doomed to die! I beg mercy for my husband!"

To the noble, denouncing himself so dauntlessly on the border of the land of liberty which he repelled, Richelieu answered:

"Await!"

To the kneeling woman, he added what so few had heard from those compressed lips at such junctures:

"Hope!"

The litter passed on to where it met Didier, held under guard in its path.

Marion was jostled by the hurrying mob as soon as the marquis raised her up.

"Wait and hope!" repeated he, as one in a stupor. "The world is turning over-heels! I denounce myself in Rueil and no one offers to detain me! Brichanteau and our tenants are bewitched and yell 'Long live the great Cardinal!' Let us follow and see what thunder-clap will befall our friend!"

Nothing so refreshes the blood as a good action, and the throng, as well as the military, seemed permeated by the surprise and happiness which the unexpected, unexampled—said some—graciousness of the Prime Minister diffused.

Didier was conducted to the part of the courtyard where the litter was set down.

For the nonce, it was converted into a capacious roofless hall. The hangings, in harmony with those of the scaffold, would have been most lugubrious, but the excess of light was exhilarating. The archers, watchmen, and

guards had cast down the partly consumed flambeaux into a heap, and this bonfire, blazing with all the brightness of pitch and little of its smoke, was supplemented by that of the fresh torches, carried by every other man, ranked along the rectangle's walls.

Though assisted to alight from his litter, Richelieu dispensed with the arm Cavoye tendered him, to the general surprise, and stepped toward the prisoner with a smile, rather welcoming than masking a menace or treachery.

"Sa, ha!" exclaimed he, "so, this is our incorrigible young duellist? You begin by breaking a braggart's head for insulting his superiors and you end by breaking the royal mandate!"

Agitation shook the bystanders. What an odd, jocular reception to an offender!

His penetrative glance had scrutinised the gentleman, and he seemed appeased—satisfied. Indeed, snatched from the dungeon, careless as to his attire under his poignant grief over the discovery of Marion's true standing, wan, famished, but haughty—joyed at having set the seal upon Marion's redemption, and now fired with the Brutus' spirit, he looked a noble man. Besides, face to face with one he esteemed as his country's enemy, his eyes kindled, his nostrils quivered like a war-horse's, and he bore insolently the glance usually consuming.

Richelieu seemed fired by this pertness. For all of his wearing a cardinal's violet-mourning, he reminded the veterans who knew him at La Rochelle Siege, of the Church-militant, in steel breast-plate over buff coat, with sword not altogether for ornament, and spurs. The pallid, ailing old prelate seemed transformed by the insolence of this unknown youth.

"Long live the great Duke!" shouted Cavoye, galled by this impudence into enthusiasm, odd in a martinet and old soldier.

Enthusiasm gains on all sides when sincere, like the ripple spread by a stone in the water; guards, castle watch, servants, villagers, yeomen of Nangis and Saverny, the curiosity-seekers, all the assemblage, like the town without, repeated the acclamation and Richelieu appeared pleased.

Suddenly Didier bent the knee and with scorn dropped under foot Laubardemont's styilet. Though the unmasked threat was now clear, the Cardinal did not frown; he could not have understood why he was to be assassinated by this young man to whom he was clement, but he regarded the return to Christian feeling as heaven-prompted. There was gratitude in his eyes.

In an awkward interval, an interruption came.

Slowly and solemnly, Gondi walked through the crowd, all giving way to him. The soldiers themselves allowed him to reach the Cardinal's side.

"In the chapel lay two dead," said he. "One prisoner has fled—no, I see the Marquis of Saverny there! The dead are Laubardemont and Laffemas—"

At this name all eyes were fastened on the Prime Minister to see how he bore the news.

"Our two Lieutenant-Criminals?" said he in pure surprise, but with certainly no grief.

"A portion of the wall fell upon them," explained the abbé, in ignorance or by design to shield Didier and Saverny; "but previously, the Chief Judge of the Supreme Tribunal had been stabbed to death. Moreover, a strange

gag, of wood shaped like a pear, of which the jointed portions could be expanded by mechanism, stifled him while in the last throes!"

"The serpent swallowed his own virus," remarked Richelieu, without taking his eyes off the prisoner. "Singular! Laffemas kills his successor—his supplanter? or did Laubardemont, true to his law-brother, commit suicide not to take the office from him, albeit he coveted it?"

Didier took a forward step.

"My lord," said his clear voice, "one of those men slew the other. He then insulted a lone woman, even in the place of sanctity. I was breaking out of my cell and hurled a stone down which crushed his head. I am guilty, furthermore, you see! Let my death no longer be delayed."

"You omit," said the old prelate, taking a forward step himself, although bringing him nearer the poniard, glittering with barely a bloodspot to speck the sheen, "you omit that you purposed adding another death more directly still to the score!"

"No! It is just an indice of what may happen if you do not heed my last words before this scaffold! Proscriptions and executions call for retaliation—private executions, private vengeance! Unless you cease or succumb, new victims will mark your path."

"My son, conspirators against the King must be punished," responded Richelieu with priestly meekness.

"A name which is red-lettered in the rubric of the State must ever be accursed!"

"My son, reflect on your speech to an aged royal servant!"

"Reflect on your course, stubborn prelate!"

Futile will be the great deeds of your administration so long as they are smeared by your janissaries' bloody hands. In future times, it will be said: "This was a great ruler, but a tyrant, whose adherents never struck a blow but the blood spurted back on his hands!"

"My son," said Richelieu, for the third time, it seeming to those near him that the conventional term in a churchman's mouth became more and more tender, "no tyrant would listen to such impertinence. Do what my followers may, I cover their acts with my red robe!"

It seemed a permission, and more than one officer prepared to rush on Didier, but Cavoye held up his left hand to stay and silence.

"The headsman's livery!" retorted the young man, furious, and spurred by the hostile movements.

Cavoye, who had set his boot on the stylet, took it up.

"Mad boy! whom even the scaffold does not daunt!" said the Minister with admiration.

"I fear nothing. My heart that was saddened, and for a moment gladdened, bounds with a new delight at being made mouthpiece for the nation on the rack! Upon the scaffold I should have struck down your protégé, that Laffemas who proudly bore the by-word of 'the Cardinal's Executioner!' I am ready for my doom. Oh, how lightened would be any bitterness if I could feel assured that my life taken by the Man of Blood should be the last of his rule!"

Intense emotion made the statesman quiver; his eyes shone with phosphorescent glare, shifting like the wave over molten lead when a chill current momentarily checks the glow. So

looked he when stifling personal motives in the grip of political expediency. But this time it was goodness that obtained the upper hand.

"My son," said he, with unmistakable affection and with complete pardon for the fresh offences, for on him rushed remembrance of his promise to Joseph, "it is not your hand that was set in this world to stay mine in duty. I forgive you, all! Like your confederate in contravention of the royal decree, go in peace; and dwell you happy with your beloved wife!"

He made the sign of benediction widely, while repeating in Latin the accompanying formula.

"I refuse the grace—while thanking you for pardoning the marquis. I demand my penalty!"

"I have the right to forgive you and not to punish," resumed the Minister, still approaching.

"The right? Oh, as 'the Father of the Kingdom?'" sneered Didier.

"As your own father!" whispered the lover of Ramire, in his ear, having ventured his head in the other's reach with a fool-hardiness apparently insane.

"Father!" repeated Didier, but luckily his voice was scarcely intelligible from the shock.

The title conveyed to the foundling more meaning than to another.

"Your father," continued Armand de Richelieu. "Pardon me for the years of neglect—for all errors through ignorance. I knew not until Father Joseph du Tremblay died in my arms, that you were son of my first and only love, my dearest Ramire, of Richelieu Bourg. I would have wedded your mother, spite of all opposition in my class and family, but they re-

moved her while I was as the dead. Spirited away to the Indies, you were born afar from France, and all I have left of life will not suffice to obliterate what misery you have undergone meanwhile. But you shall no longer be termed Forsaken! It is I who ordered your marriage to the woman you loved! Not twice in our line shall the mistake be made of Love being sunk under Prejudice. Motherless one, forgive as I forgive all—never more shall there be a secret execution! the dungeons shall be filled up! prisons shall be razed before I blush under my son's reproofs!"

To the lookers-on, hearing no words of sense, unable to understand the looks of the two participants in the discovery, they only saw a reverend father lecturing a wayward youth who finally let wisdom rule him. A spell seemed cast over the young man who had tried to provoke the ailing eagle. What was their consternation when they saw Didier open his arms and throw them about the old prelate's neck. They feared it was to strangle him, since he had rejected the dagger.

But as the soldiers pressed forward to rescue or revenge, Richelieu waved them back with one hand, while he returned the embrace with the other arm.

Tears were seen in his eyes, and in his voice the same tearfulness made the tone unsteady.

"Gentlemen and friends, the base of my illness was the blank prospect concerning my inheritor. I sought for a man among ye who should stand in the gap before me for the Lord, but I found none. That which man could not obtain, the Holy Father hath provided. He has come for whom my brain ached—the solace is here for which my heart yearned! Blessed

be the name of the Father who is ever-merciful to His children!"

Still encircling Didier with his arm, and leaning trustfully upon him, he led him within the castle, while all faces were weighed down by wolder.

"Faith! captain," said Gondi, in a loud voice, taking the chief guardsman by the arm, "the master has fallen into the good way since the visit of the envoy from the Vatican! 'The Holy Father' there has sent him a successor, you see! It will not be long before we learn of whom this Signor Mazarini was the har-binger!"

"I am neither churchman nor courtier," said Covoye bluntly. "I do not sharpen my sword to cleave Gordian knots. All I understand is that he adopts this brave young man, who once defended his name—"

"Sooth! I was his second in that affair!"

"Instead of that pest Laffemas! But who is this Didier, whom Father Joseph and you patronise?"

Gondi, smiled, to effect deep knowledge.

"The husband of Marion Delorme! replied he, following within the castle as the concourse broke up. "Thanks to her, the secret machinations of Prince Gaston have been foiled. It is a meet recompense for the Magdalena that she weds this gentleman of Blois, who will take her to that part, or some other similarly benighted, where her adventures are not town-talk!"

A few days after Gondi might congratulate himself on his foresight, for Didier, equipped lavishly, including the past Laffemas had provided, sailed from Havre with his bride. All things considered, fearing there would not be

time before his death to inculcate his true heir into his policy, loving Ramire's son too dearly to pit him against the woes which he saw would envelop the realm, the Cardinal bade him good-by !

He saw that he was happy with Marion, and that their life in Paris, or even France would be impossible. Her defender would have to draw sword over and over again, spite of all edicts.

But he was left melancholy, mourning like David over Absalom. The two or three secretaries replacing Father Le-Clerc du Tremblay, heard him mutter sometimes, when he smilingly gazed off into vacancy or studied the Globe :

"Blessed is the man whom Thou chasteneth, and who is alone like the sparrow on the housetop!"

Whereupon Chavigny would whisper to Des Noyers : "Still brooding over that whelp Laf-femas ! Heaven gives cardinals great luxuries but also the prodigal nephew ! It is compensation !"

Dr. Thémines was attached to the Minister's household ; he soon discovered that custodians of state secrets must dwell in an honorable durance ; his practice in Paris was lucrative, but he was often heard to sigh : "The world will long suffer since circumstances prevented me extinguishing the Pest !"

Being an Italian, Mondori enjoyed the favor of Richelieu's successor, as long as it was a desirable favor, well into the reign of Louis XIV.

He brought of Louissette as an actress, and many a new author, but with the garrulity of

old age, when early memories are the loveliest, he would tell them :

“ You may talk about playwrights, but there are none now! In my youth, the greatest did not disdain to write pieces to which your best attempts are fustian! I had the honor, with my troupe, to perform for the first, and the last time, alas! the famous tragedy of ‘Mirame,’ by no less a personage than the late Cardinal, Duke of Richelieu! *Corpo di Dio!* that was a play! Four hours’ ding-dong, give-and-take! not a line less than twelve syllables! how its leagues of sonorous verse trowled along the stage! Ah, but for the loss of my two greatest lions, we should have roared you a triumph! But, ‘lackaday! I lost, through a duel, the celebrated Matamore, to begin with, and his substitute, an amateur of Blois, who rehearsed magnificently, was sent on a mission abroad so that he never appeared on any stage! And with him went my other star! the lovely and witty Marion Delorme! Yes, gentlemen, that dame of fame was my leading lady in the good old times of the Thirteenth Louis. With them ‘Mirame’ would have been fixed in the repertoire! But the manuscript is lost! Unique! given me by the illustrious author! with his autograph and seal! A villainous cook, who had no idea soaring higher than ortolans, used the pages to the last, religiously preserved as I had treasured it, to wrap up the cutlets when I gave a feast to celebrate Cardinal Mazarini’s re-entry into Paris, after the *Fronde*. Ah, if not treasonable, I wish we had the play-writing Cardinal re-entering instead of the card-playing one!”

Saverny closed his uncle’s eyes in peace; but he did not long enjoy the addition of Nangis

to his titles; no longer a fop but an able soldier, he was slain at the Battle of Clarenton; it was during a charge made by the Frondists, and in the rank cutting him down was Brichanteau. Although his hand had not touched his cousin, the Banneret was so heart-sore from this result of fratricidal war that he became a monk.

The veil maintained over Didier's parentage enabled him to keep his office during all the mutations of the Regency of Anna of Austria and the rule of Mazarin; but the distance did not moderate the anxiety with which he watched the travail of France.

Only once had he and Marion cause to regret their exile; it was when the *Gazette de France* brought news of his father's death; but it was glorious; the arms of his country had conquered on every side—he had fulfilled the training of Father Joseph and the desire of King Henry the Fourth. Except that grief, the married lovers had peace, and solitude is the Eden of the happily wedded.

THE END.

14 DAY USE
RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED
LOAN DEPT.

This book is due on the last date stamped below, or
the date to which renewed.

RECEIVED
Renewed books are subject to immediate recall.

SEP 11 '64 -4	PM

LD 21A-60m-4, '64
(E4555s10)476B

General Library
University of California
Berkeley

491302

816h
maEw

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

